Why Raeliana Ended Up at the Duke's Mansion
3
Whale
Original story by
Milcha

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Volume 3

Obsession and Sincerity

Whale

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Table of Contents

Stage 6
Torch-Lighting Ceremony
4

Stage 7
Peaceful Life?
161

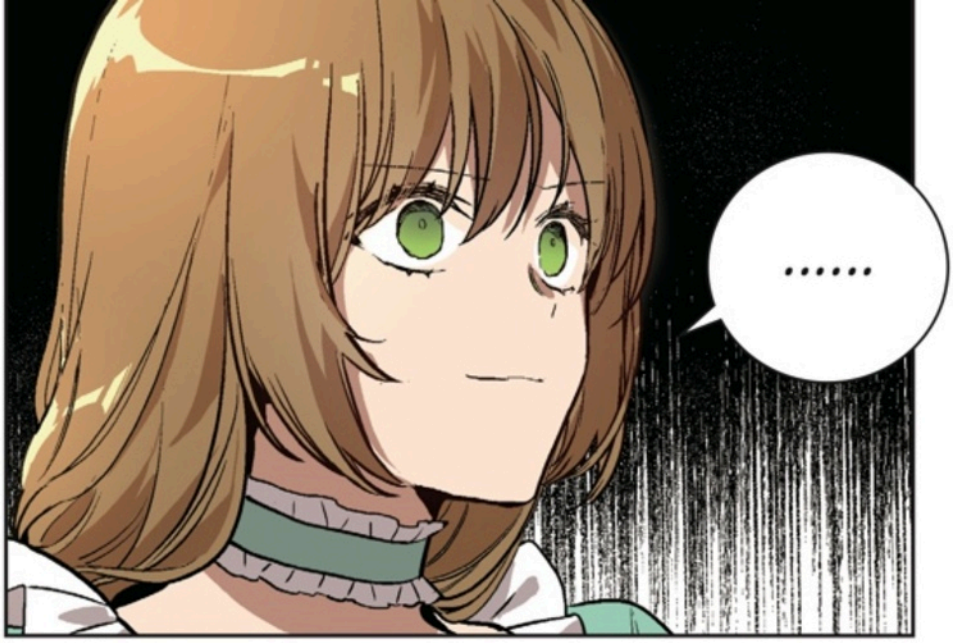
Stage 8
Adjournment
223

Stage 6

Torch-Lighting Ceremony

WHAT IS SHE TALKING ABOUT—A MOUNTAIN MOVING?
HEH!
PFFT.
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, MADAM? YOU SEEM QUITE UPSET.
NO, REALLY, OVER THERE.....
BAM

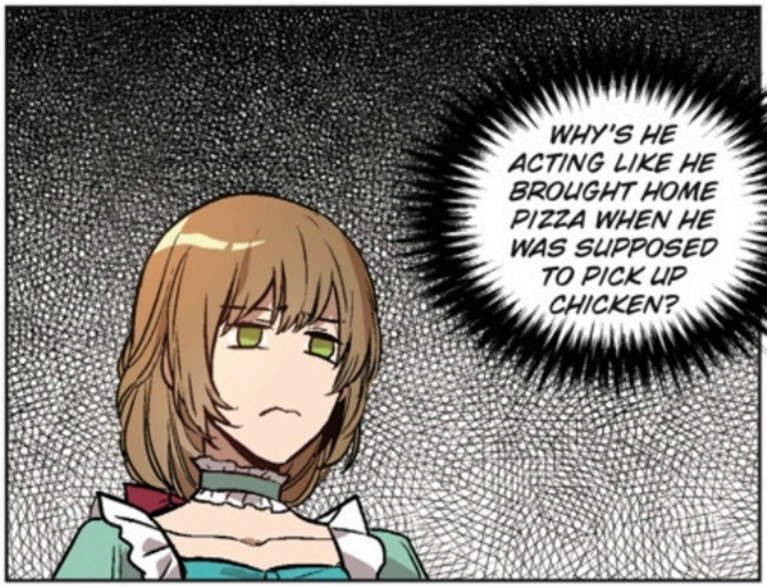
WH-WHAT IS THAT...?


.....

RAELIANA.

WHAT WITH THIS RAIN WASHING AWAY THE MONSTERS' BLOOD...
...IT SEEMS NO DRAGON WILL BE MAKING AN APPEARANCE.
WE WAITED AS LONG AS WE WERE ABLE, BUT THE RAIN ONLY GOT WORSE, AND I JUDGED OUR PROSPECTS DIM.
PLOP
PERHAPS, HERE IN SYCRET...
...THERE ARE NO DRAGONS AT ALL.
SNAP
IN LIEU...
...I HOPE YOU FIND THIS TO BE ACCEPTABLE.
HEAVE

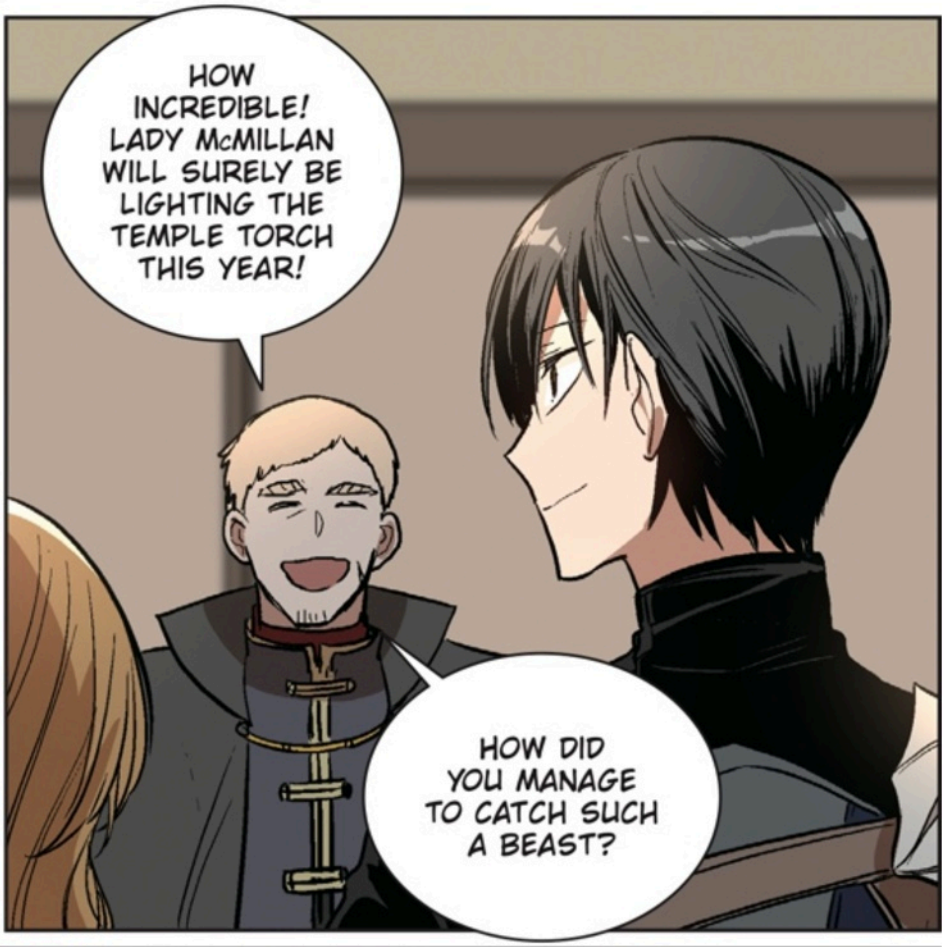
DUN
DUN


WHY'S HE ACTING LIKE HE BROUGHT HOME PIZZA WHEN HE WAS SUPPOSED TO PICK UP CHICKEN?

CLANK
AS FOR THE DRAGON YOU SO WISHED FOR—

I'LL ATTEMPT TO LURE ONE OUT OF ANOTHER MOUNTAIN.

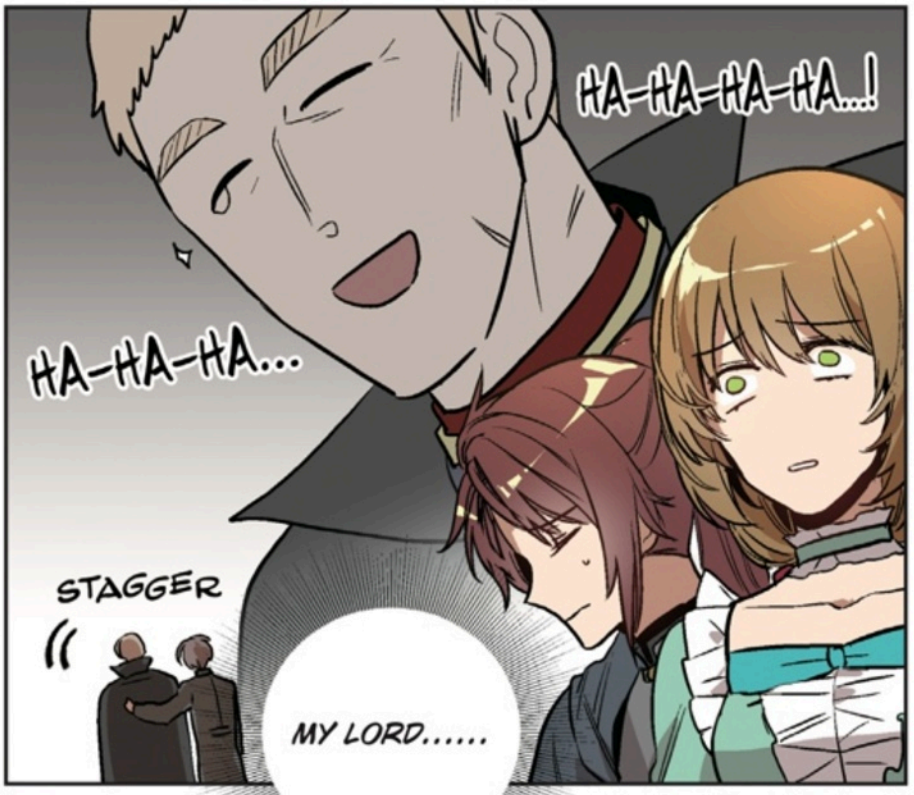
THE DRAGON I SO WHAT-TED FOR? WHEN DID I—

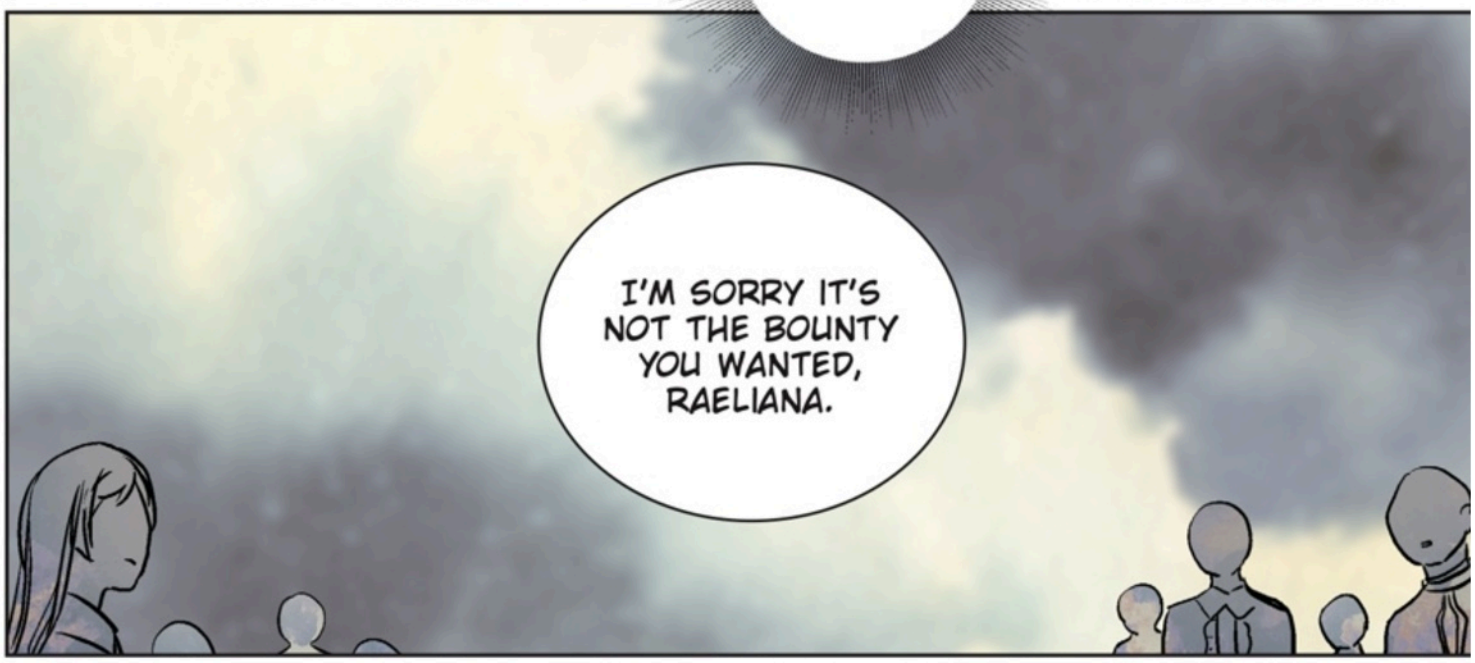

HOW INCREDIBLE! LADY McMILLAN WILL SURELY BE LIGHTING THE TEMPLE TORCH THIS YEAR!
HOW DID YOU MANAGE TO CATCH SUCH A BEAST?

AH, WE CHANCED UPON SOME CREODERS.
AFTER DISPOSING OF THEM, WE USED THEIR BLOOD AS BAIT.

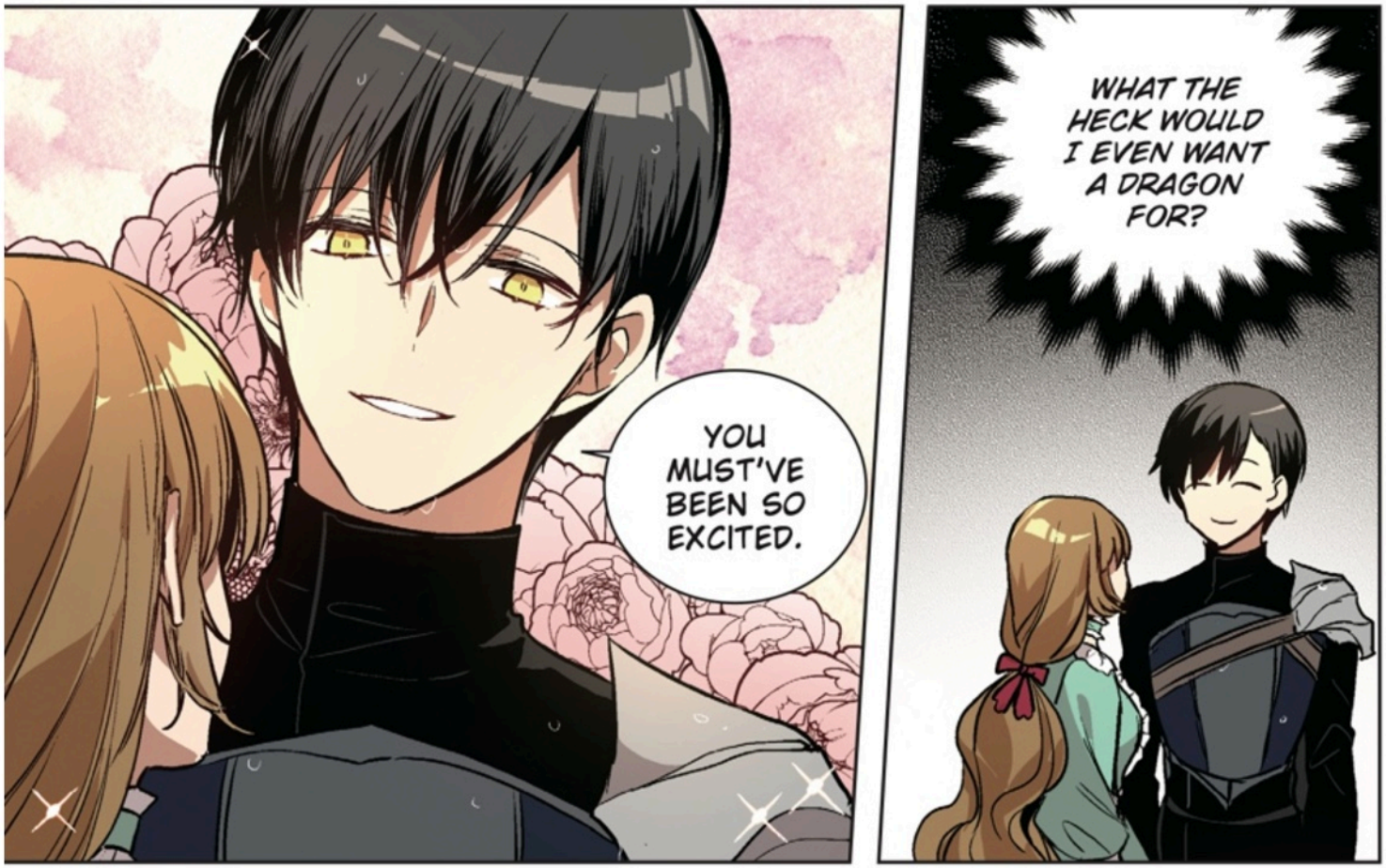
.....

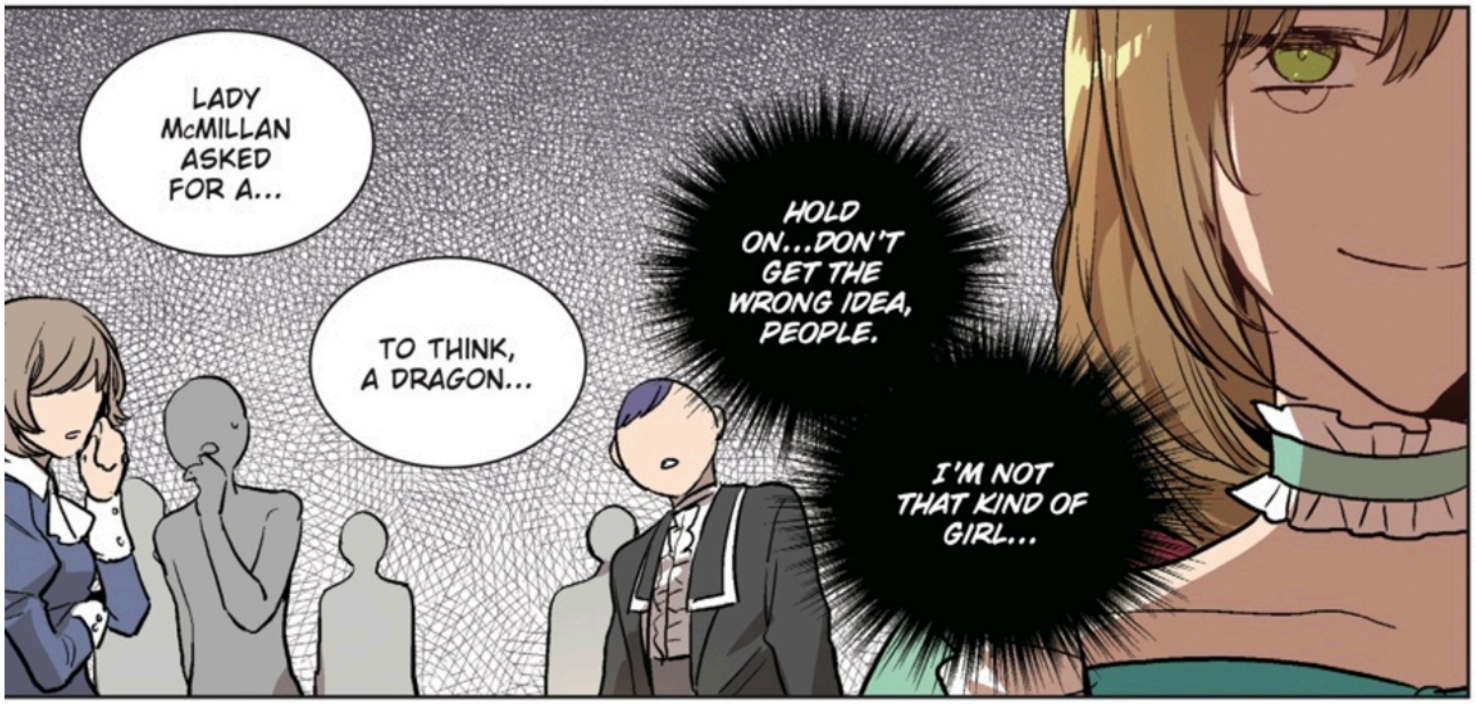
I-I WOULD EXPECT NOTHING LESS FROM YOU, DUKE WYNKNIGHT! HA-HA-HA-HA-HA!


HA-HA-HA-HA...!
HA-HA-HA...
STAGGER
MY LORD.....

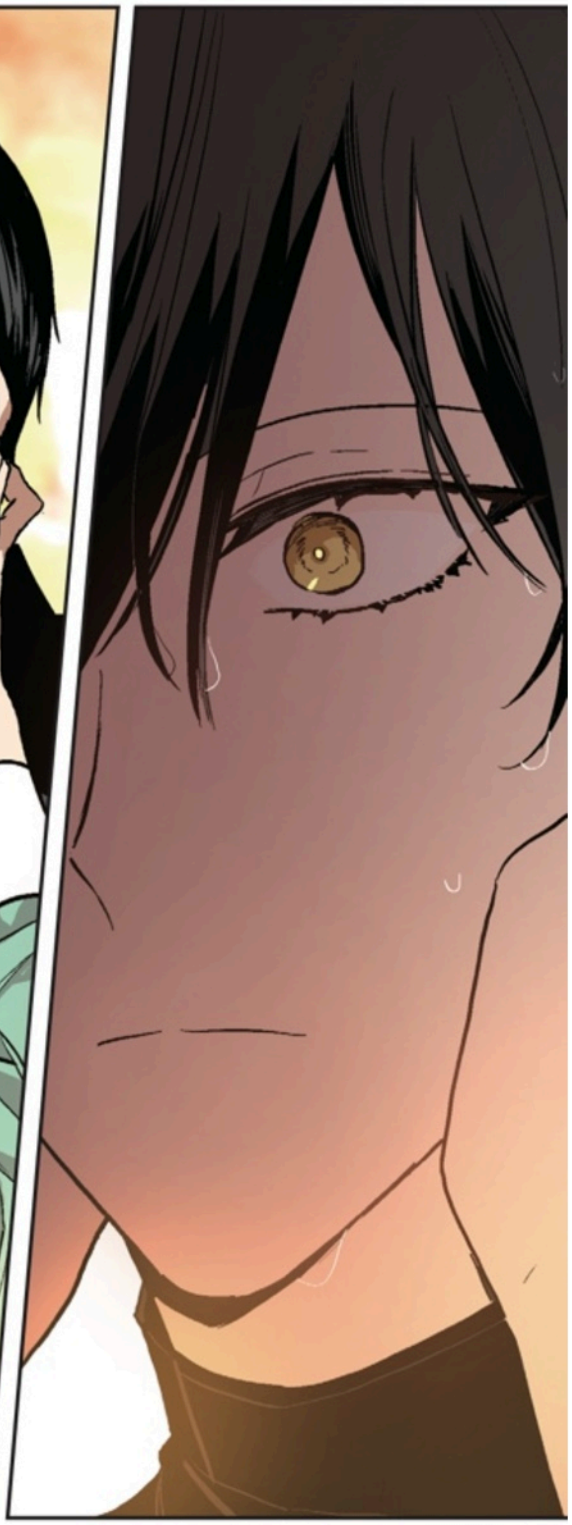

I'M SORRY IT'S NOT THE BOUNTY YOU WANTED, RAELIANA.

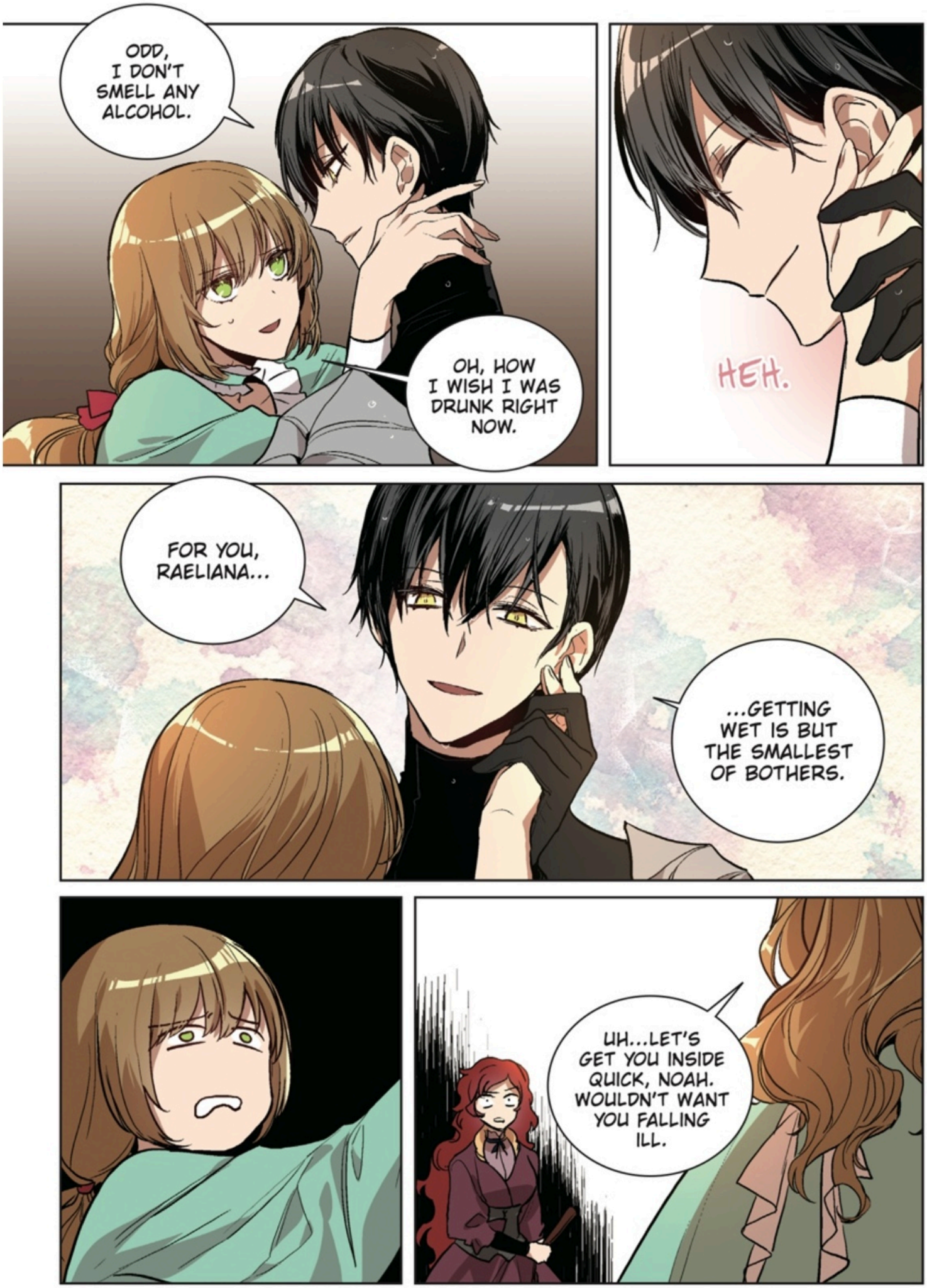
HUH? HUUUH?!


YOU MUST'VE BEEN SO EXCITED.
WHAT THE HECK WOULD I EVEN WANT A DRAGON FOR?

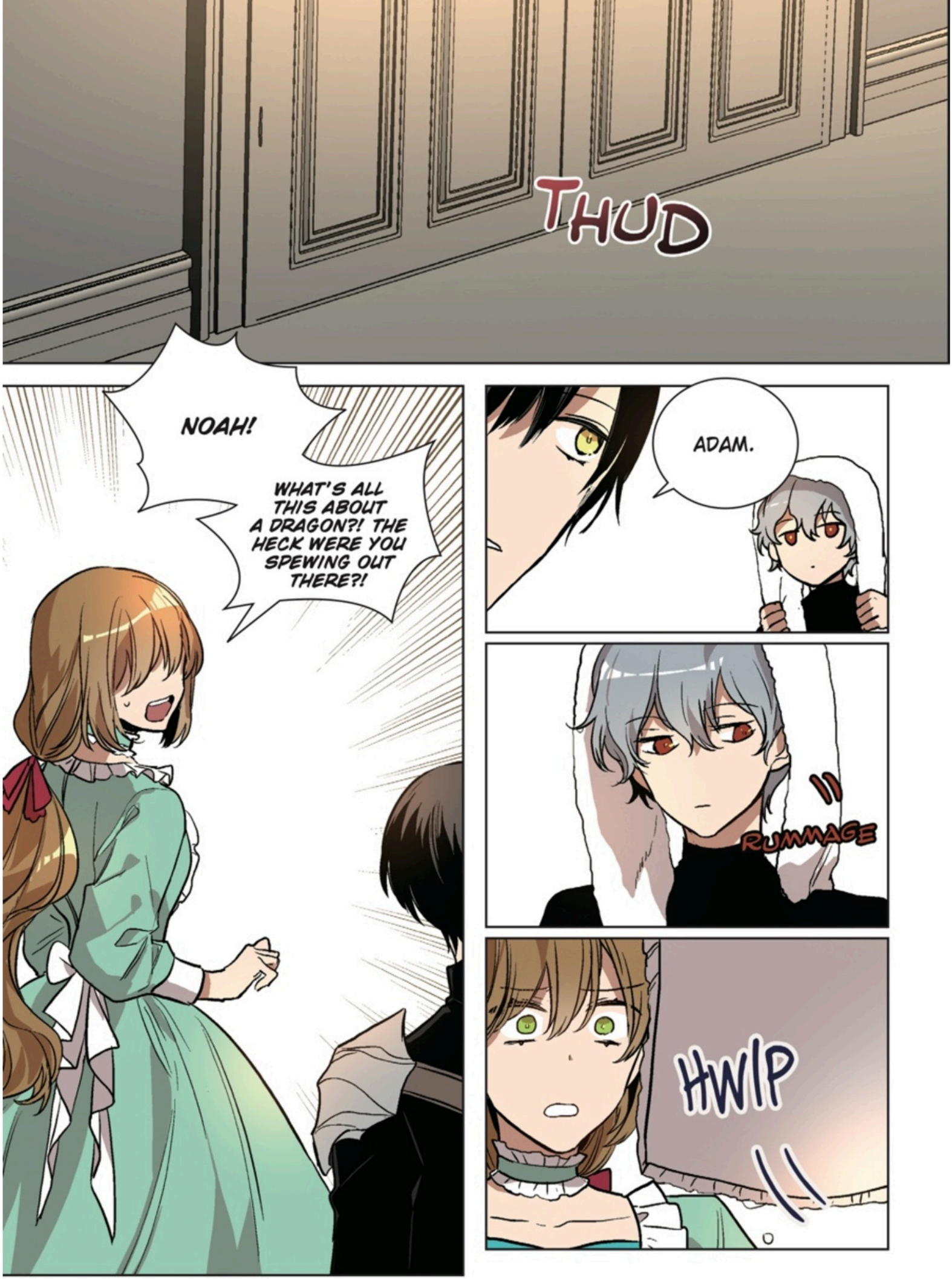

LADY McMILLAN ASKED FOR A...
TO THINK, A DRAGON...
HOLD ON...DON'T GET THE WRONG IDEA, PEOPLE.
I'M NOT THAT KIND OF GIRL...

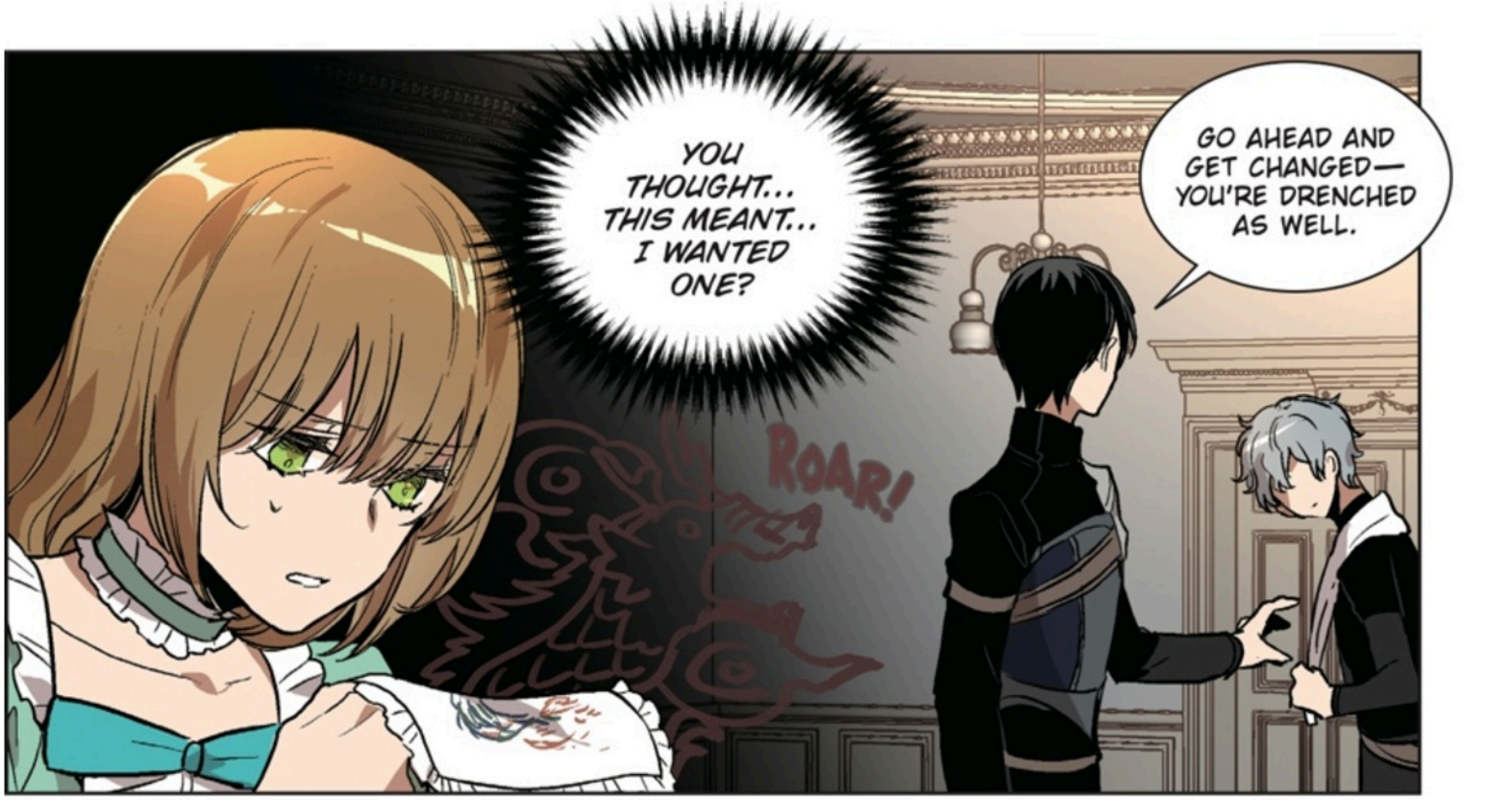
YOU'RE SOAKED TO THE BONE.

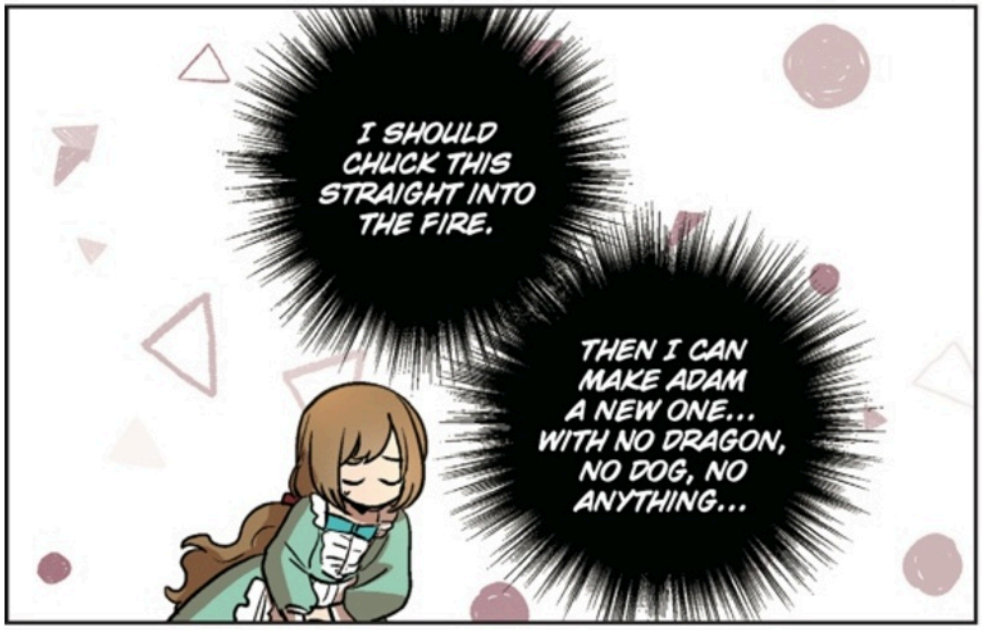



ODD, I DON'T SMELL ANY ALCOHOL.
OH, HOW I WISH I WAS DRUNK RIGHT NOW.
HEH.
FOR YOU, RAELIANA...
...GETTING WET IS BUT THE SMALLEST OF BOTHERS.
UH...LET'S GET YOU INSIDE QUICK, NOAH. WOULDN'T WANT YOU FALLING ILL.

WINK
CLACK


THUD
NOAH!
WHAT'S ALL THIS ABOUT A DRAGON?! THE HECK WERE YOU SPEWING OUT THERE?!
ADAM.
RUMMAGE
HWIP

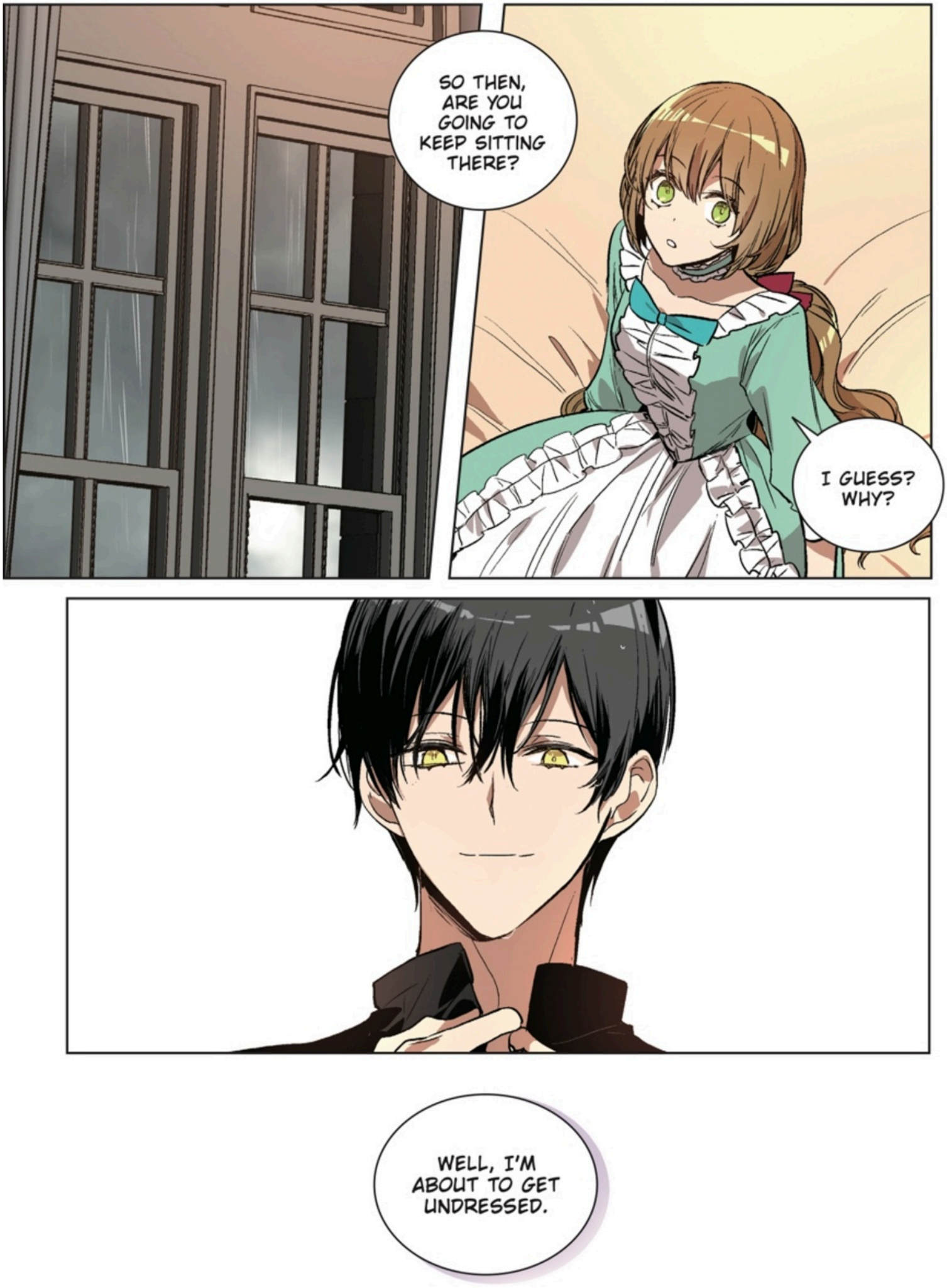

YOU THOUGHT... THIS MEANT... I WANTED ONE?
ROAR!
GO AHEAD AND GET CHANGED— YOU'RE DRENCHED AS WELL.

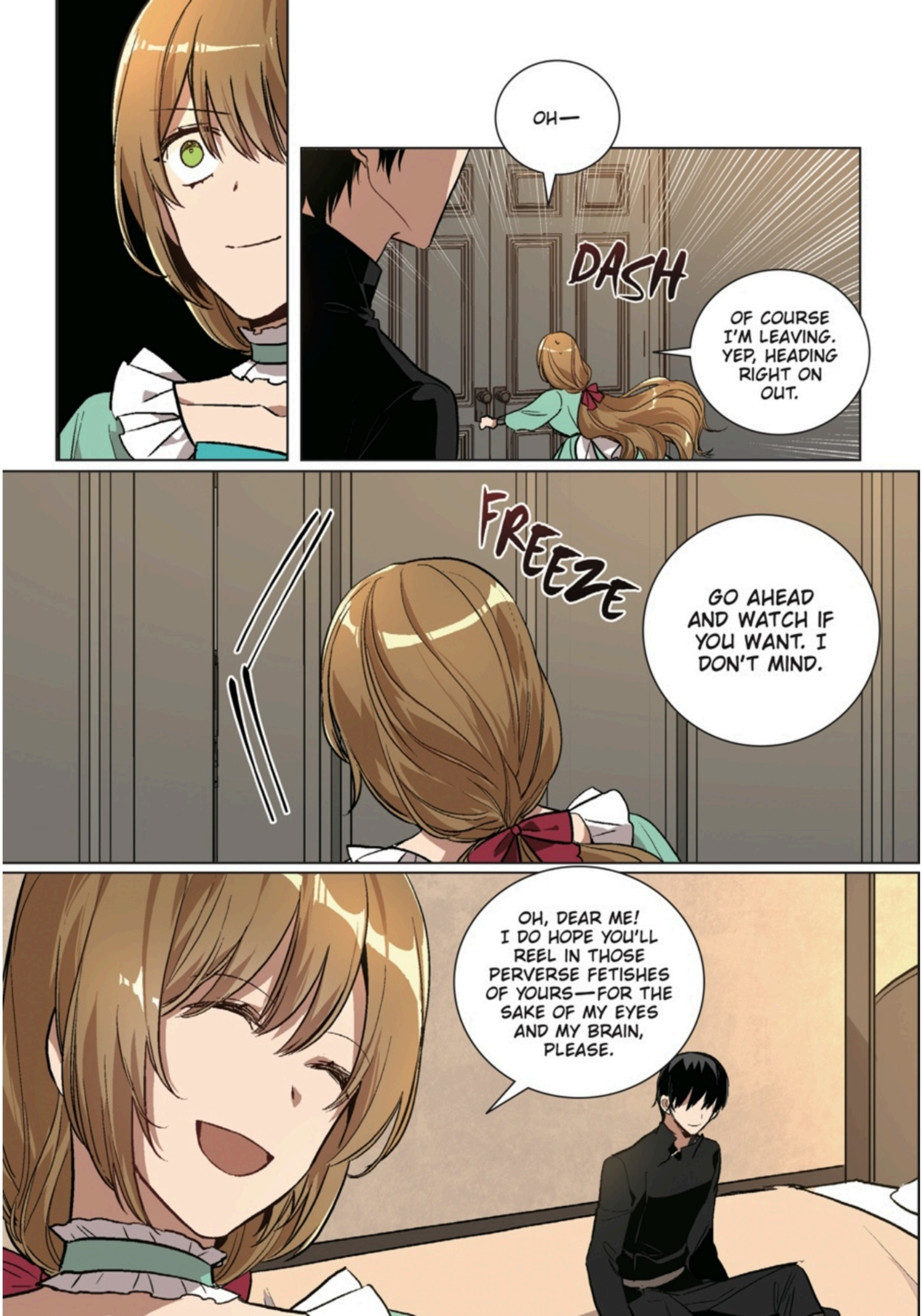

I SHOULD CHUCK THIS STRAIGHT INTO THE FIRE.
THEN I CAN MAKE ADAM A NEW ONE... WITH NO DRAGON, NO DOG, NO ANYTHING...

RAELIANA.

PLEASE DON'T BE TOO UPSET.
I'LL GET YOU THAT DRAGON FROM ANOTHER MOUNTAIN.

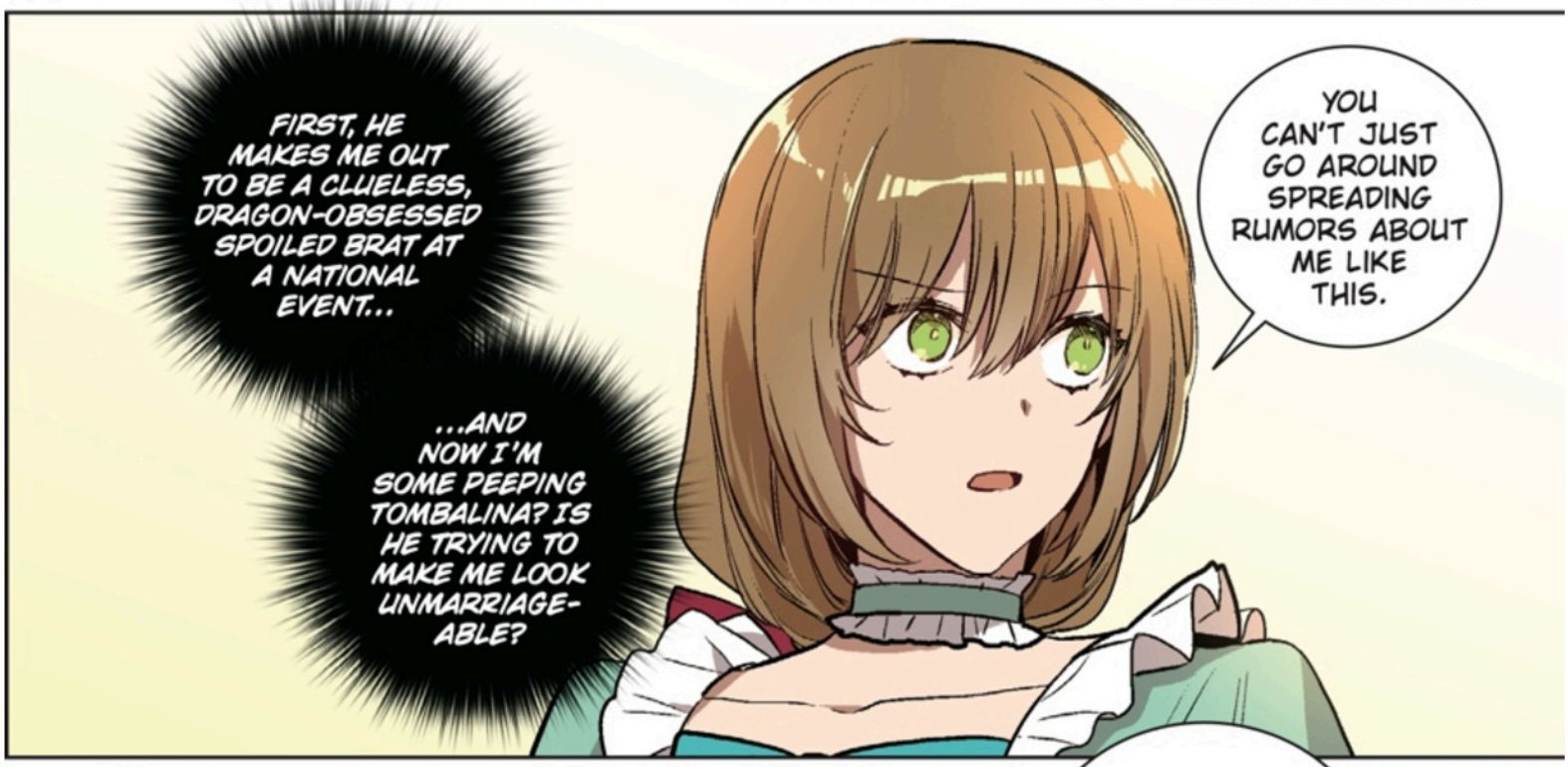
NOAH...I'LL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO GET YOU TO NOT DO THAT.
A DRAGON... I MEAN, WHAT WOULD I EVEN DO WITH IT...?
BUT YOU SO DESIRED ONE, NO?
I'M NOT SOME SPOILED THREE-YEAR-OLD WHO...
...AAAND YOU'RE TEASING ME, AREN'T YOU?
TOOK YOU LONG ENOUGH, HMM?
URGE TO PUNCH— RISING...
EVEN A PILLOW...JUST LEMME PUMMEL SOMETHING...!!


SO THEN, ARE YOU GOING TO KEEP SITTING THERE?
I GUESS? WHY?
WELL, I'M ABOUT TO GET UNDRESSED.

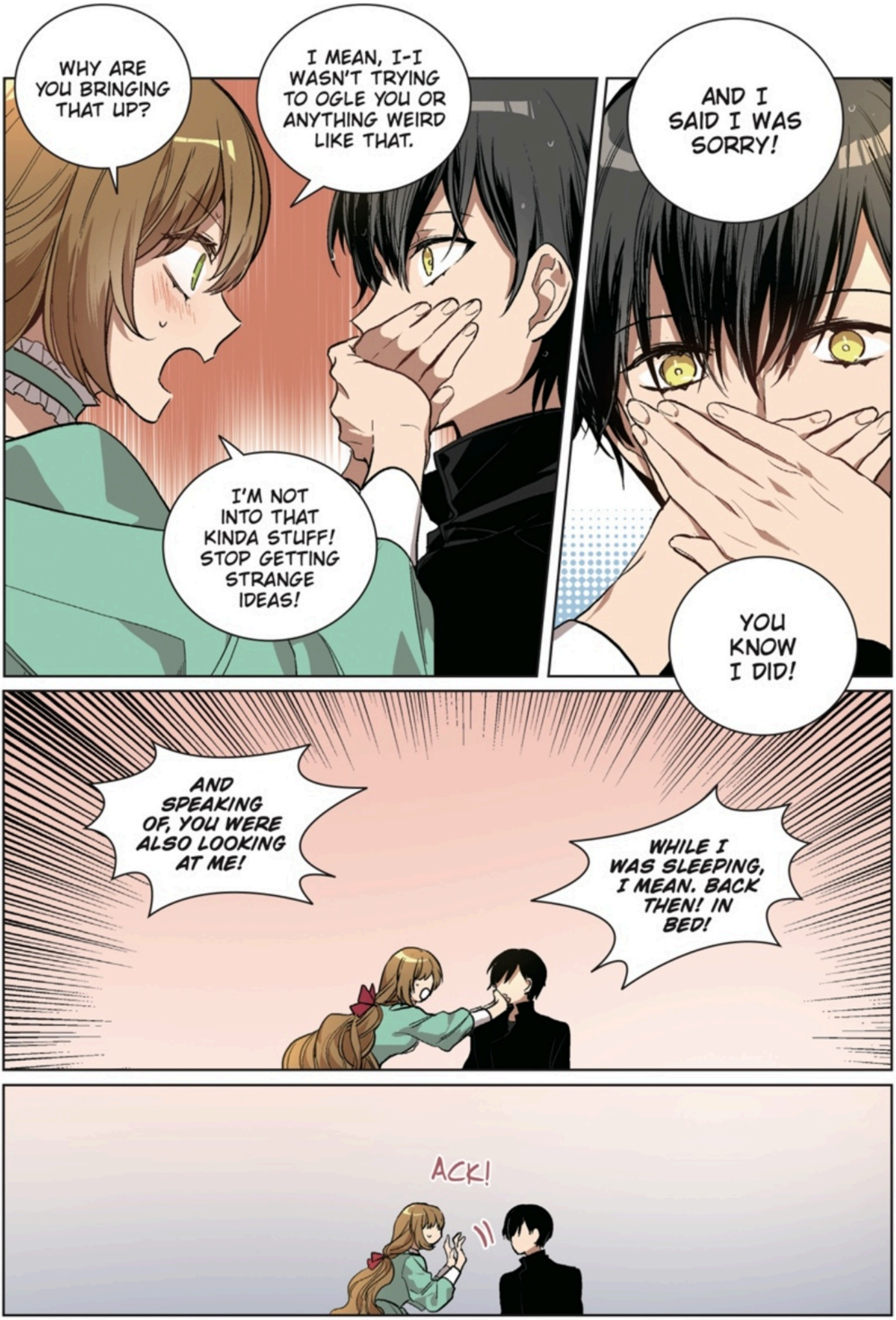

OH—
DASH
OF COURSE I'M LEAVING. YEP, HEADING RIGHT ON OUT.
FREEZE
GO AHEAD AND WATCH IF YOU WANT. I DON'T MIND.
OH, DEAR ME! I DO HOPE YOU'LL REEL IN THOSE PERVERSE FETISHES OF YOURS—FOR THE SAKE OF MY EYES AND MY BRAIN, PLEASE.

AH... THAT REMINDS ME.

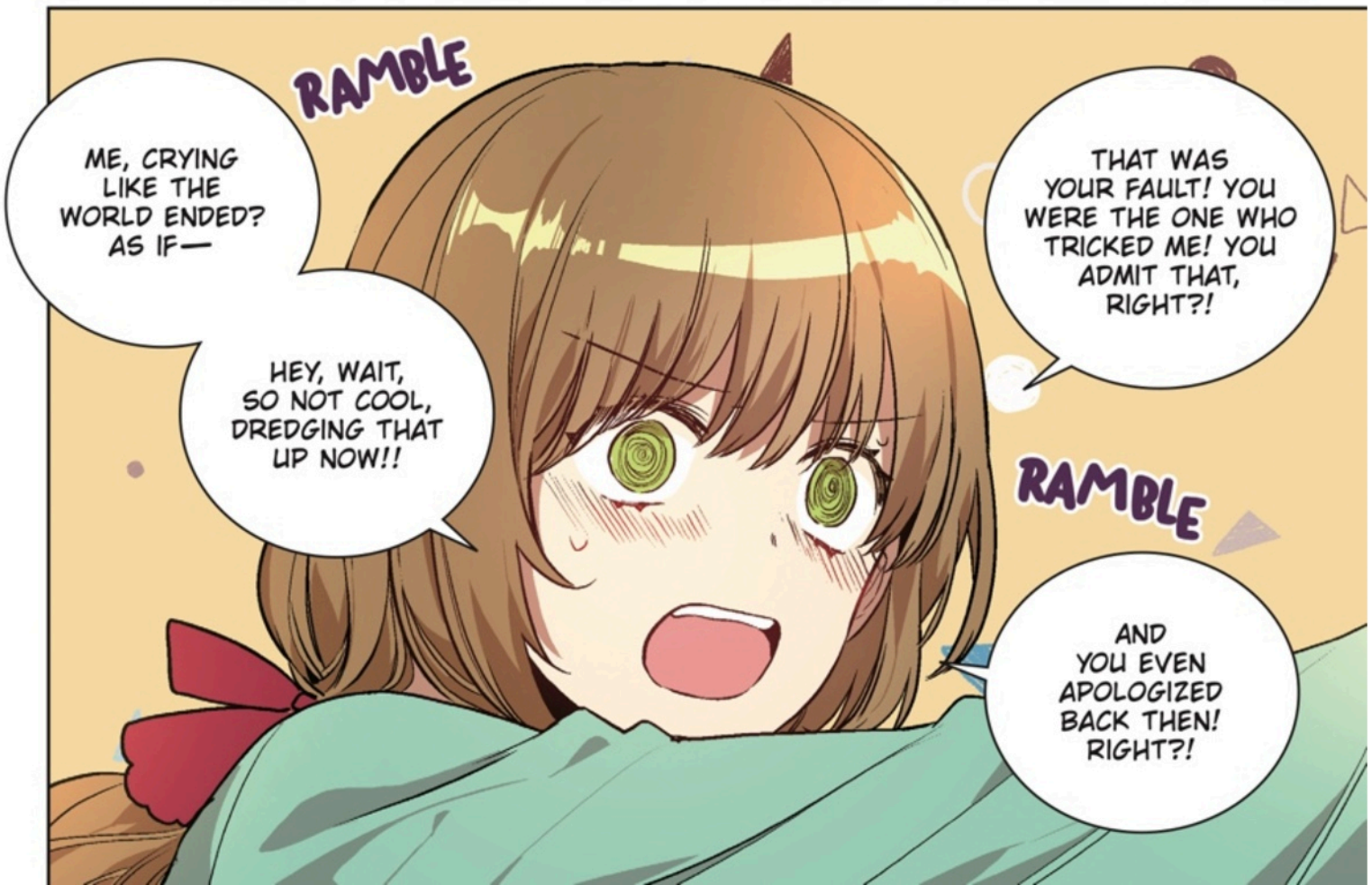
VOYEURISM IS SOMETHING OF A HOBBY OF YOURS.
UM... EXCUSE ME?


FIRST, HE MAKES ME OUT TO BE A CLUELESS, DRAGON-OBSESSED SPOILED BRAT AT A NATIONAL EVENT...
...AND NOW I'M SOME PEEPING TOMBALINA? IS HE TRYING TO MAKE ME LOOK UNMARRIAGE-ABLE?
YOU CAN'T JUST GO AROUND SPREADING RUMORS ABOUT ME LIKE THIS.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THAT TIME I CAUGHT YOU WATCHING ME SLEE—
GAAAH!!!


WHY ARE YOU BRINGING THAT UP?
I MEAN, I-I WASN'T TRYING TO OGLE YOU OR ANYTHING WEIRD LIKE THAT.
I'M NOT INTO THAT KINDA STUFF! STOP GETTING STRANGE IDEAS!
AND I SAID I WAS SORRY!
YOU KNOW I DID!
AND SPEAKING OF, YOU WERE ALSO LOOKING AT ME!
WHILE I WAS SLEEPING, I MEAN. BACK THEN! IN BED!
ACK!

BACK THEN?
WHEN YOU FELL ASLEEP ON MY HORSE AND THEN ASSUMED I'D FORCED MYSELF UPON YOU AND CRIED AS THOUGH THE WORLD HAD ENDED AND—
AAAAAAH !!!!!!!!
WHOP


RAMBLE
ME, CRYING LIKE THE WORLD ENDED? AS IF—
HEY, WAIT, SO NOT COOL, DREDGING THAT UP NOW!!
THAT WAS YOUR FAULT! YOU WERE THE ONE WHO TRICKED ME! YOU ADMIT THAT, RIGHT?!
RAMBLE
AND YOU EVEN APOLOGIZED BACK THEN! RIGHT?!

TILT
UGH, THIS JERK, REALLY...!!
ARE YOU SERIOUSLY GONNA KEEP THIS UP?
SHFT

...MPH.

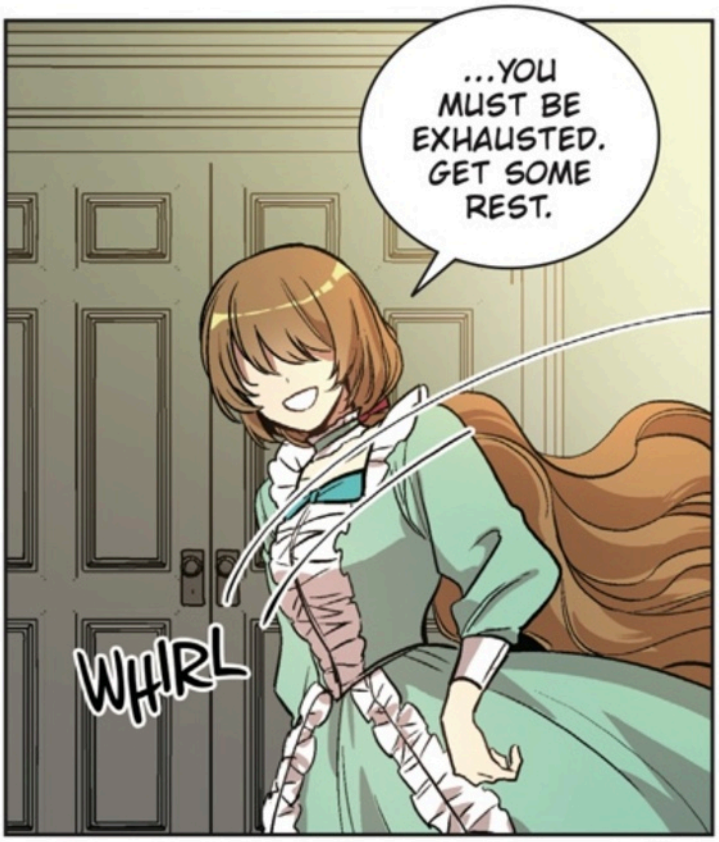
NO ONE LIKES GUYS WHO OBSESS OVER OTHER PEOPLE'S EMBARRASSING PASTS!
PROBABLY.

SO, YOUR BAD, RIGHT?

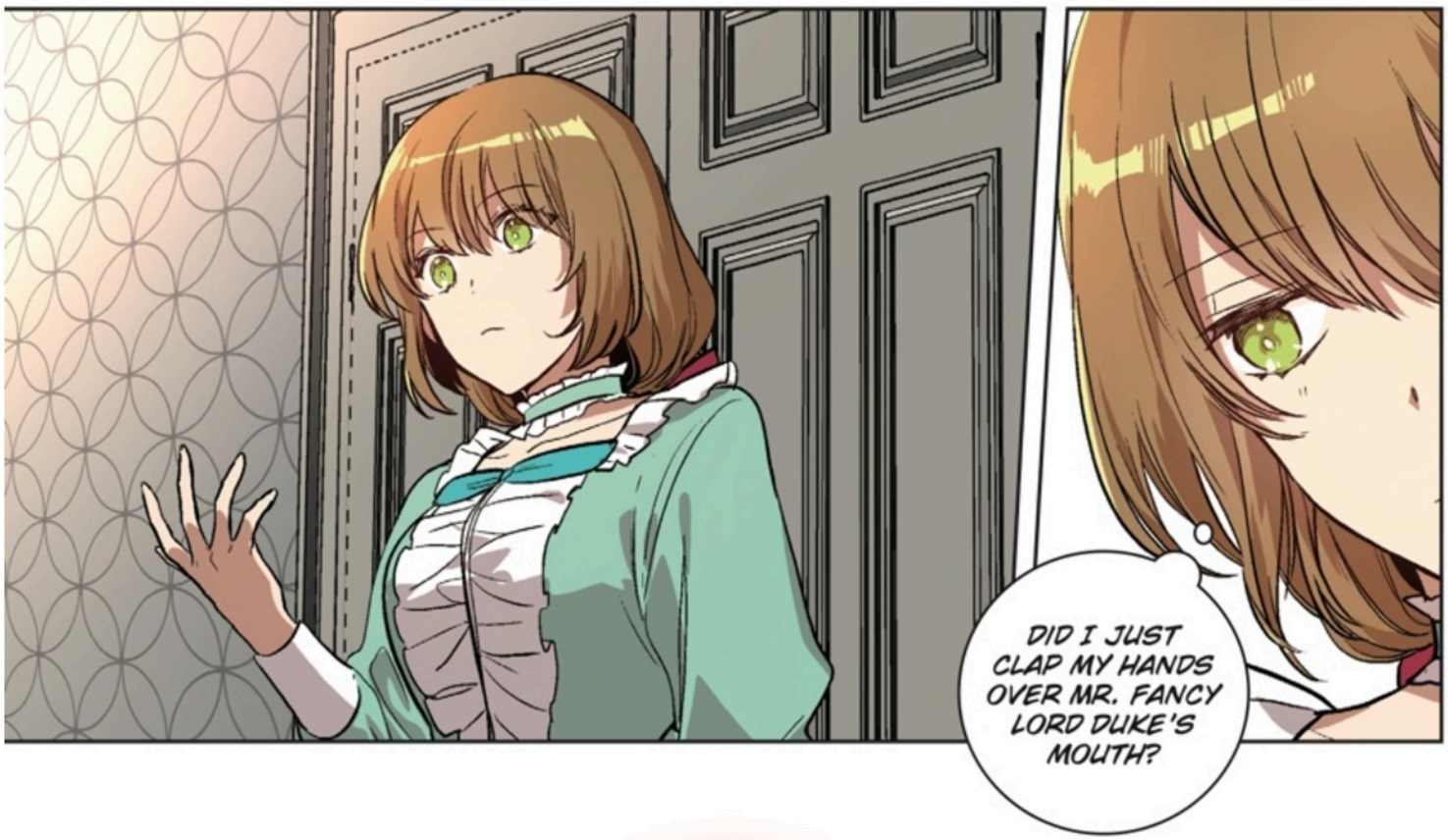
NOD

HUH, HE'S SUDDENLY ACTING DOCILE.
OKAY, NO MENTIONING THIS STUFF AGAIN.

WELL THEN, NOAH...

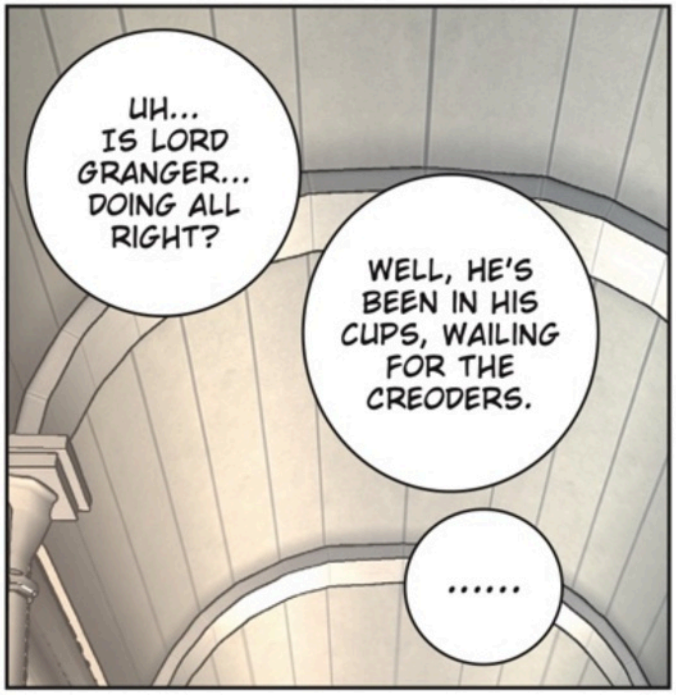

...YOU MUST BE EXHAUSTED. GET SOME REST.
WHIRL

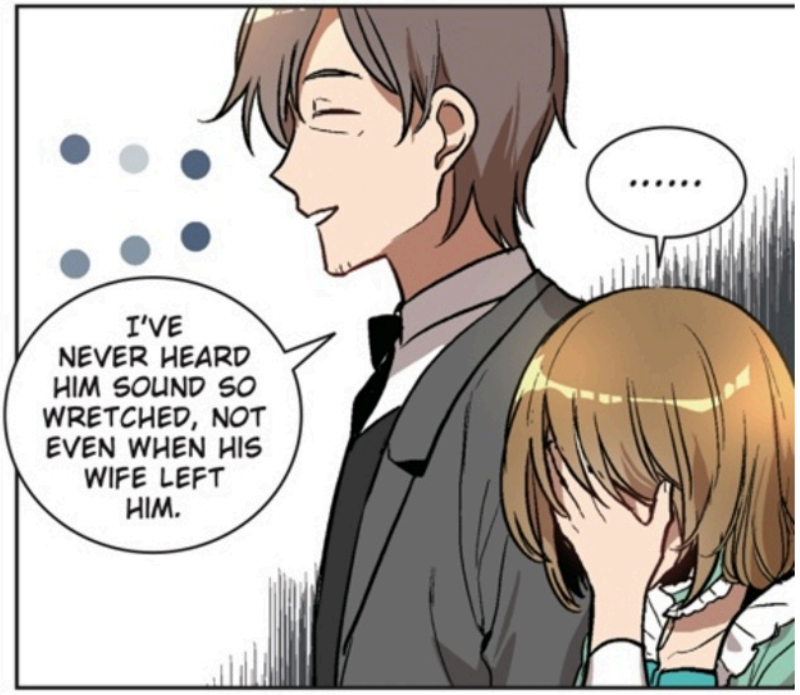
.....
.....?
SOOO, YEAH. I'LL BE OFF.
CLICK
WHEW.



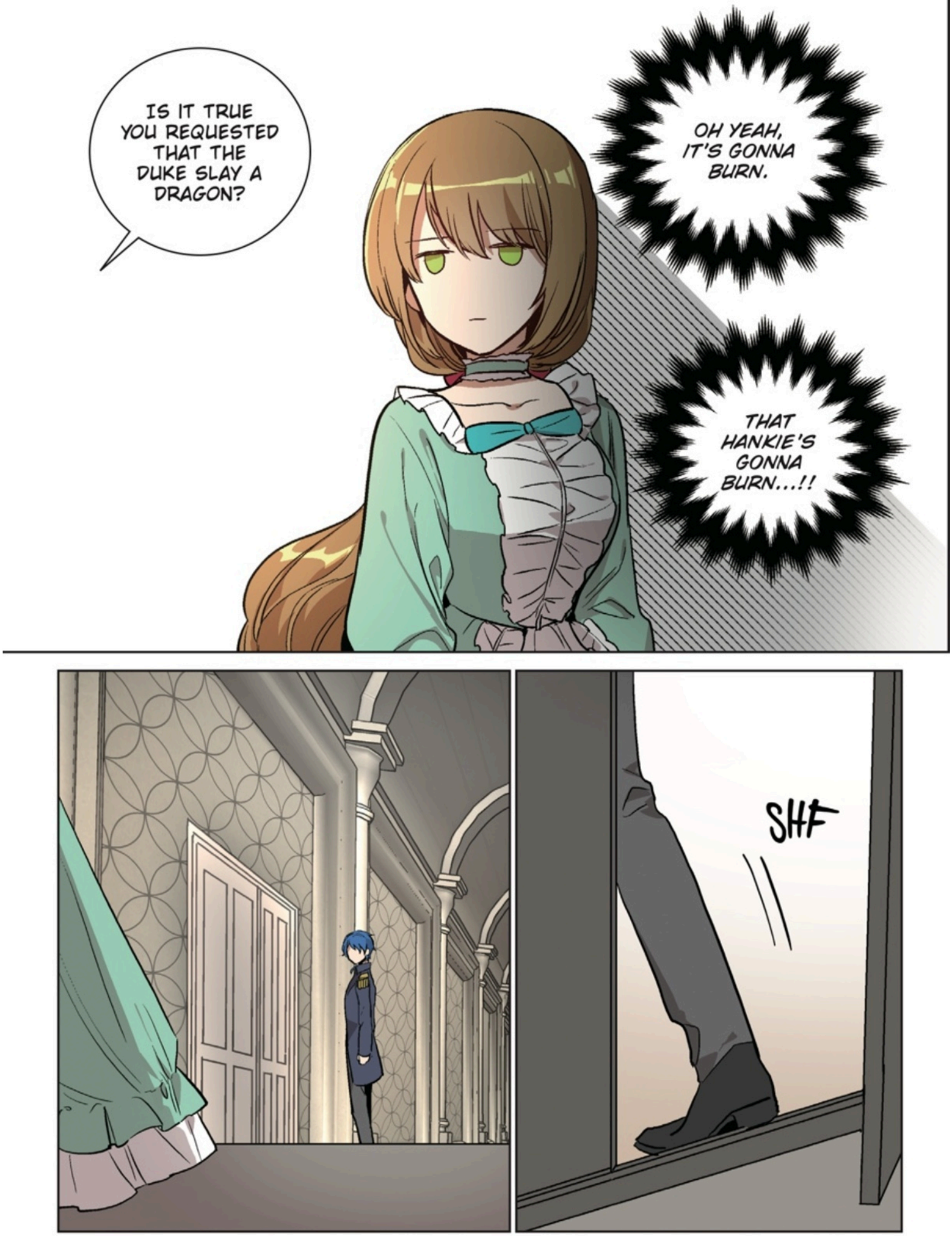
AM I... GETTING COMFORTABLE WITH HIM?

ALLOW ME TO ESCORT YOU.


UH... IS LORD GRANGER... DOING ALL RIGHT?
WELL, HE'S BEEN IN HIS CUPS, WAILING FOR THE CREODERS.
.....


.....
I'VE NEVER HEARD HIM SOUND SO WRETCHED, NOT EVEN WHEN HIS WIFE LEFT HIM.

AH...
...THAT REMINDS ME...


IS IT TRUE YOU REQUESTED THAT THE DUKE SLAY A DRAGON?
OH YEAH, IT'S GONNA BURN.
THAT HANKIE'S GONNA BURN...!!
SHF

I'M PLEASED TO SEE YOU BACK SAFELY. I'D BEGUN TO WORRY AT YOUR DELAY.
SKIP THE PLEASANTRIES.
WHINE.
.....
IT WAS YOUR FIRST TIME FELLING A MONSTER.
FIRST TIME BRINGING ONE IN, YOU MEAN.
QUITE SO. THE FIRST TIME YOU'VE BROUGHT ONE IN AND PRESENTED IT AS AN OFFERING TO A LADY.
YOUR POINT?

NOTHING AT ALL.
HOW INSIPID.
WHAT OF DUKE BLAKE?
IT SEEMS HE'S UNABLE TO RETURN AS OF YET. OWING, PERHAPS, TO THE WOMAN HE'S RUMORED TO BE GROWING CLOSE WITH.
A WOMAN?
INDEED. WHITTON IS INVESTIGATING HER NOW.
A WOMAN, IS IT...
CREAK
AND? IT LOOKS AS THOUGH YOU'VE MORE TO SAY.
...NOAH.

I ASK YOU THIS BOTH AS YOUR ADVISER AND FRIEND.
THE WAY YOU ACT TOWARD LADY McMILLAN...IS IT SINCERE?
NO.
...YOU'VE BEEN A BIT ODD THESE DAYS.
THE ONLY ODDITIES HERE ARE WHAT'S COMING FROM YOUR OWN MOUTH.
OH, THEN YOU WOULDN'T OBJECT IF I WERE TO PURSUE LADY McMILLAN, YES?

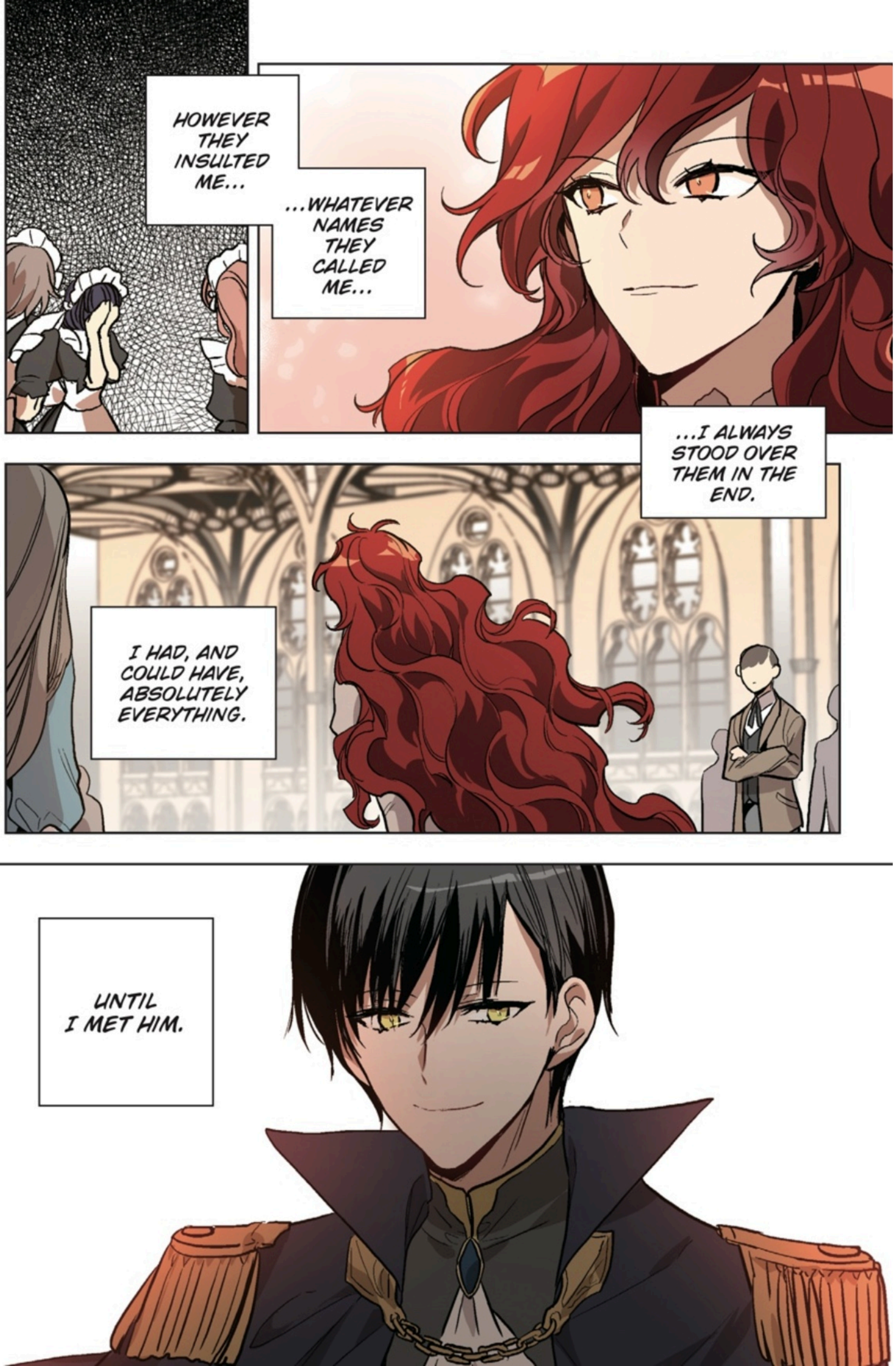
WHAT GAME DO YOU THINK YOU'RE PLAYING WITH ME HERE...
SHFT
CHILL
...COUNT KEITH WESTERNBERG?

KNOW YOUR PLACE.

...UNDERSTOOD.

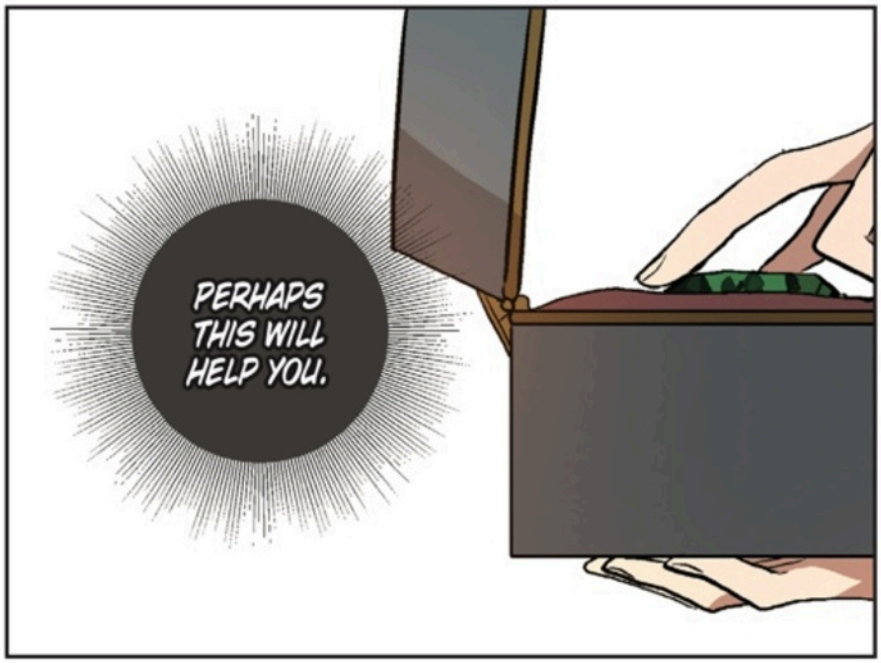
Why Raeliana Ended Up at the Duke's Mansion

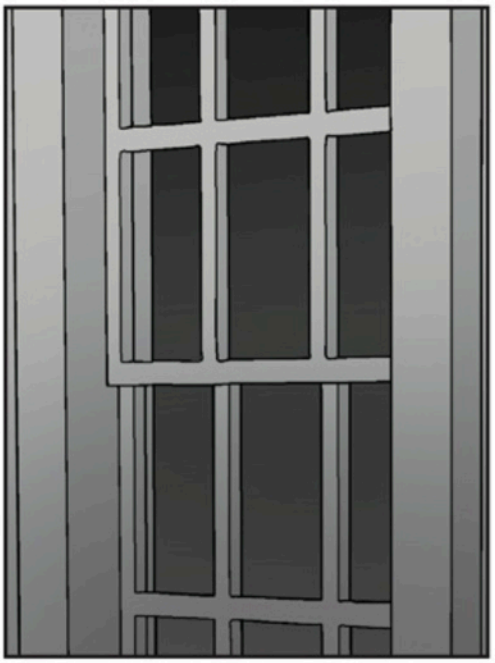
THE PORCELAIN DOLL WITH AMBER FOR EYES, THE FINEST LIGHT-PINK POWDER WITH THE SCENT OF ROSES.
THE RUBY-RED LIPS HOLDING A THIRTY-CARAT DIAMOND, THE LACE STOCKINGS FLASHING SNOW-WHITE THIGHS, THE MAN ENTANGLED THEREIN.
IT ALL BELONGS TO ME — THE AVARICIOUS VIVIAN SHAMAL.


HOWEVER THEY INSULTED ME...
...WHATEVER NAMES THEY CALLED ME...
...I ALWAYS STOOD OVER THEM IN THE END.
I HAD, AND COULD HAVE, ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING.
UNTIL I MET HIM.

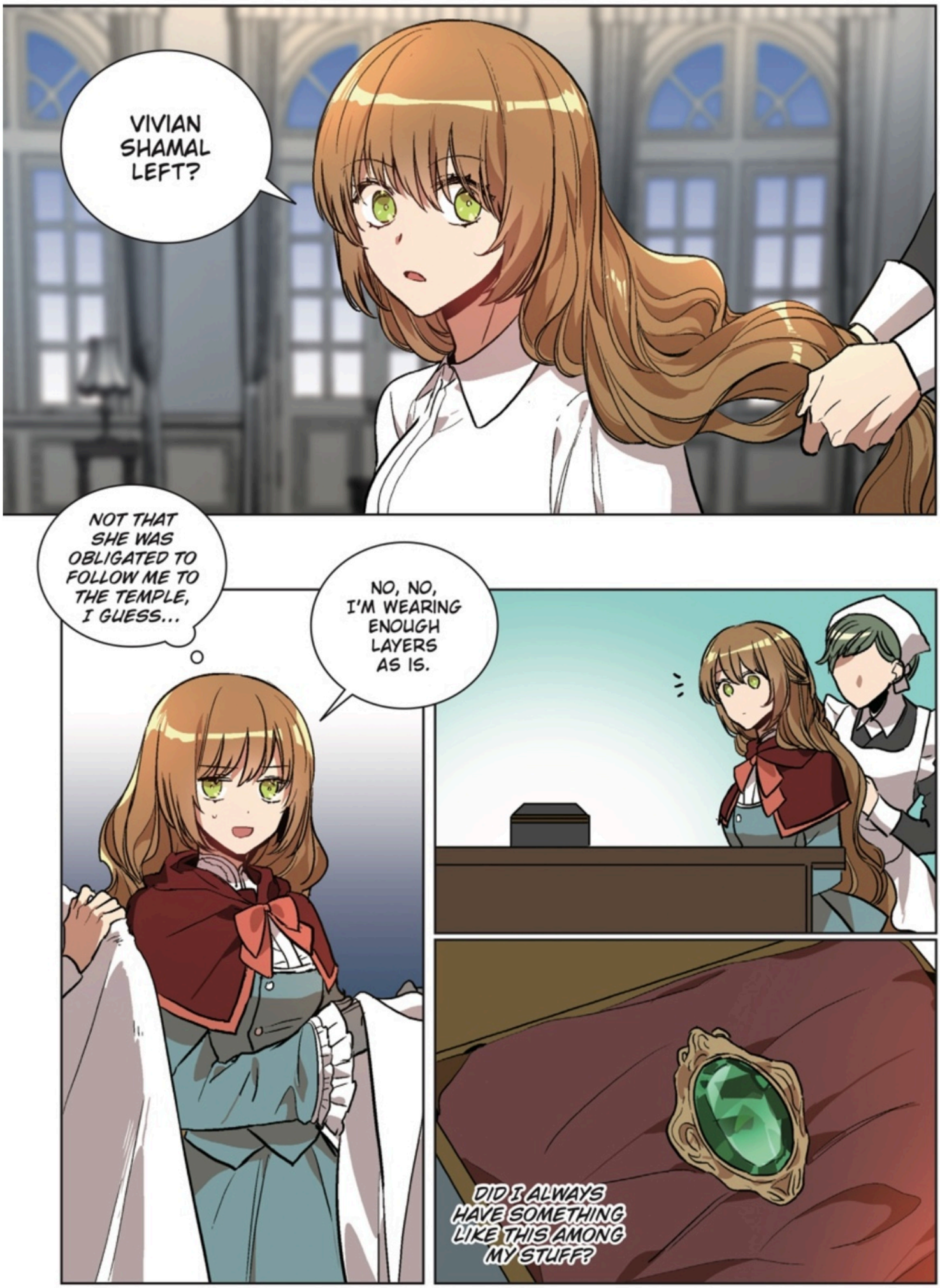
CRASH
I ACCEPTED THE PROPOSAL FROM THAT CRIPPLED KING TO MAKE HIM FEEL WHAT IT'D BE LIKE TO LOSE ME, BUT...
REACH
THERE'S SOMETHING YOU WANT, ISN'T THERE?

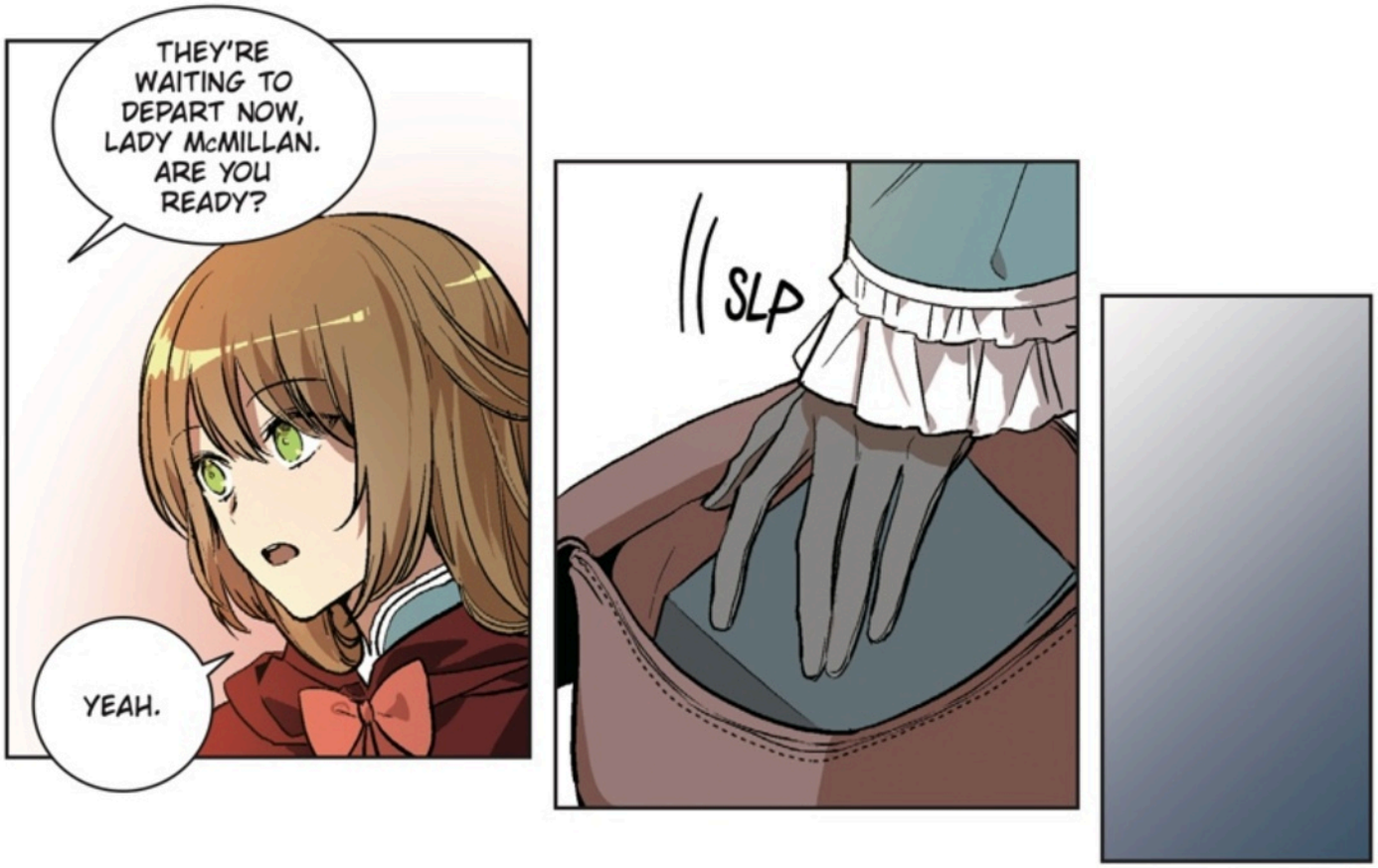
I CAN'T BEAR SOMETHING BEING OUT OF MY REACH.

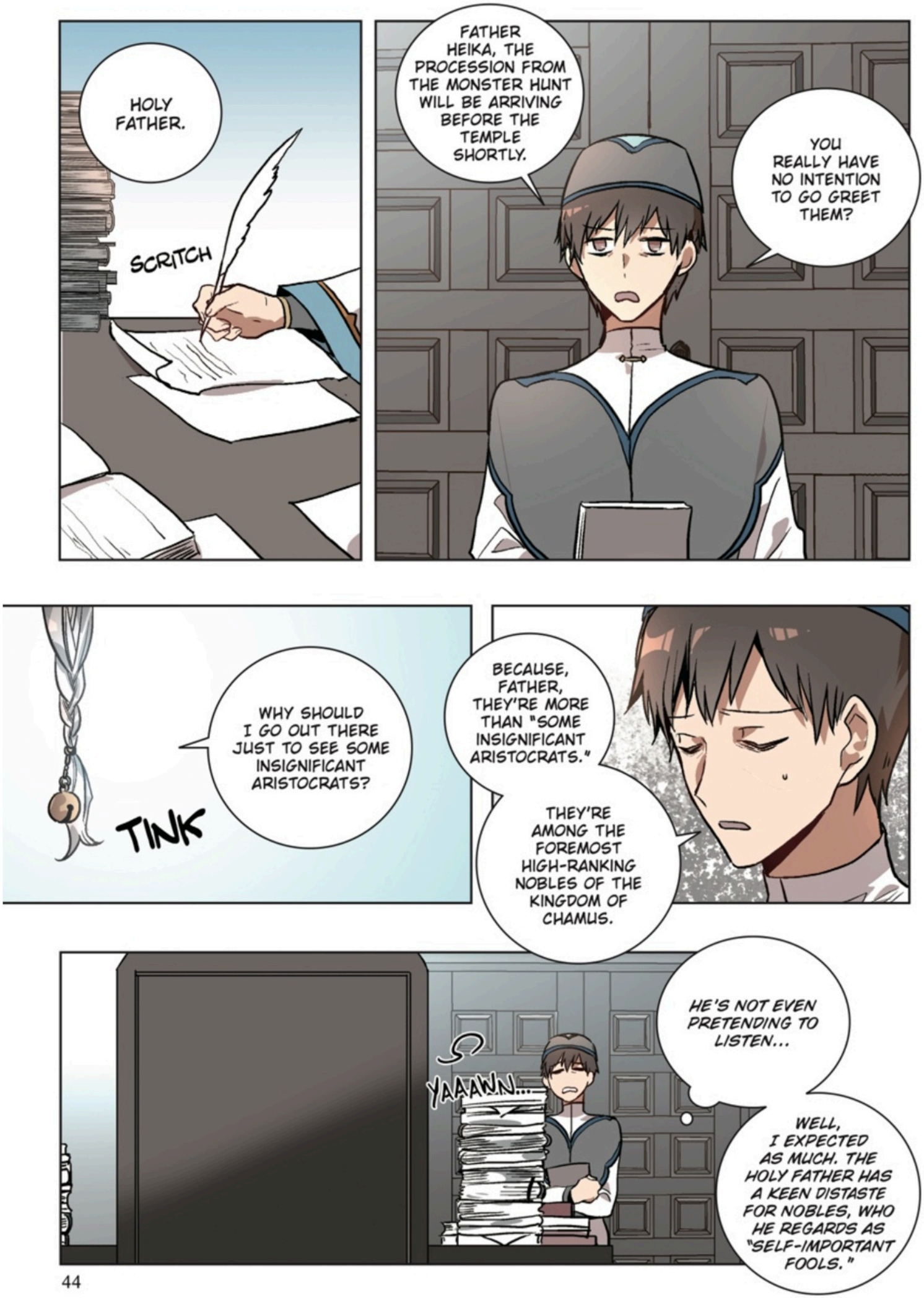

PERHAPS THIS WILL HELP YOU.

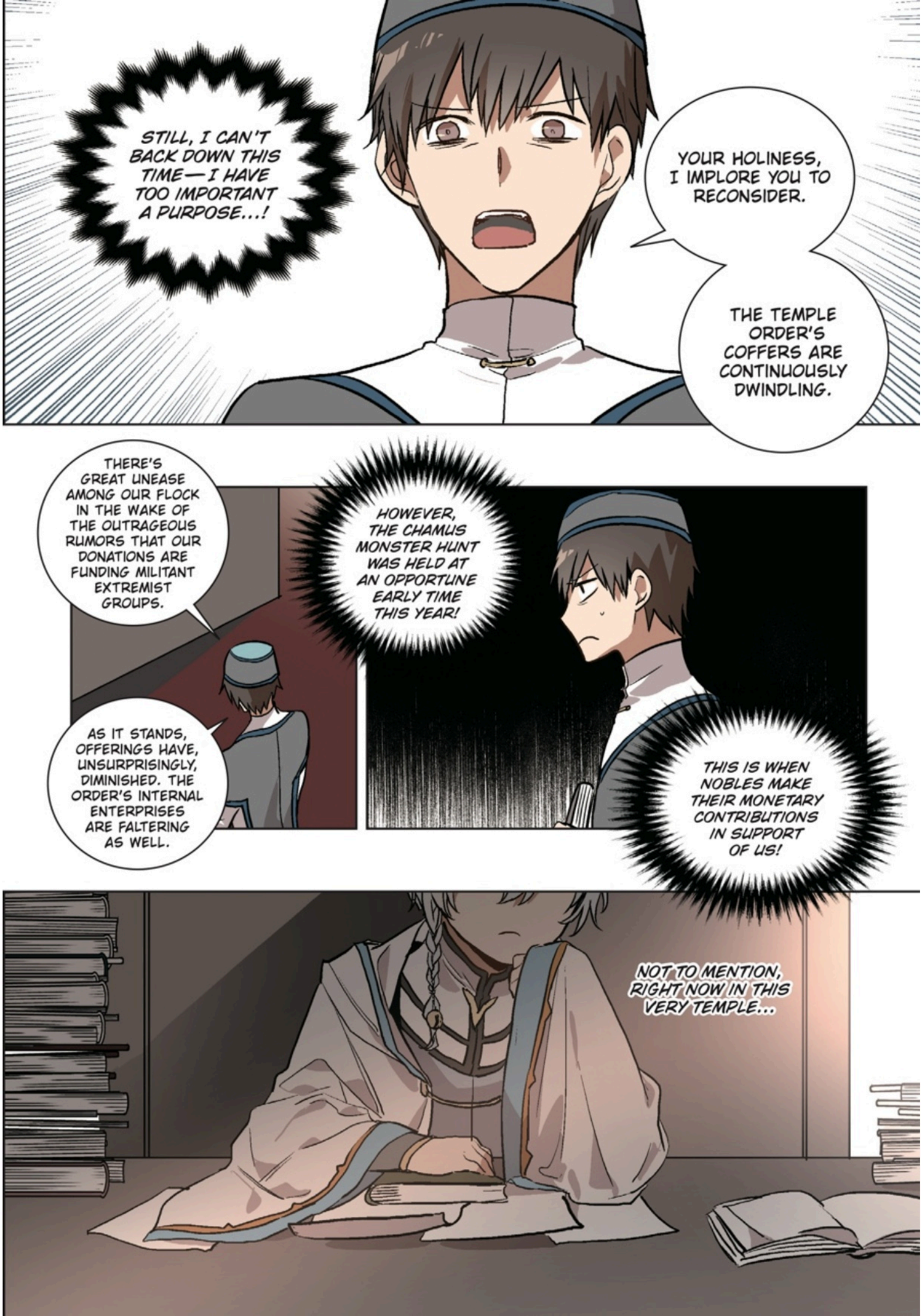


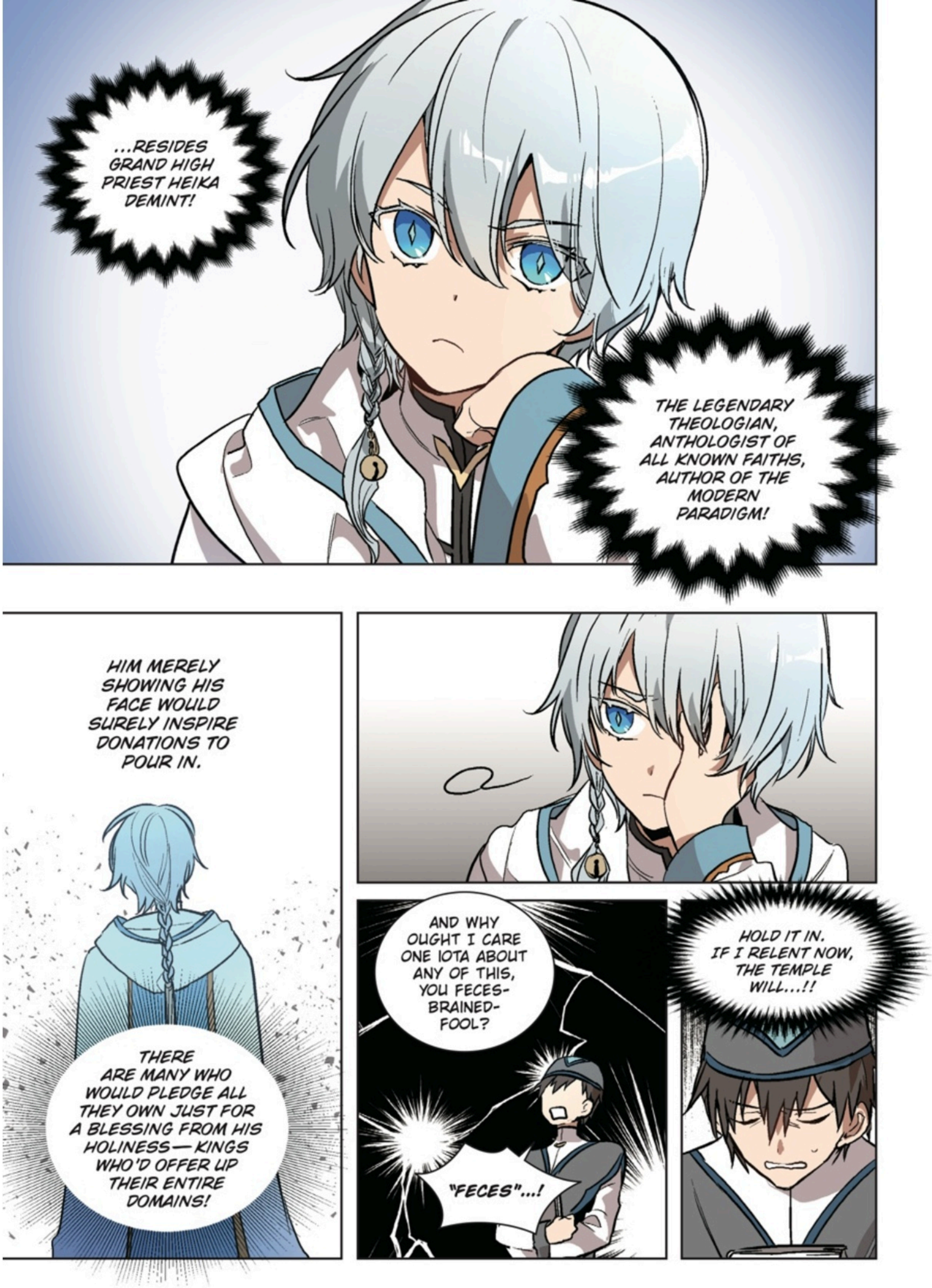
...IT ALL BELONGS TO ME.
TO THE AVARICIOUS VIVIAN SHAMAL.


VIVIAN SHAMAL LEFT?
NOT THAT SHE WAS OBLIGATED TO FOLLOW ME TO THE TEMPLE, I GUESS...
NO, NO, I'M WEARING ENOUGH LAYERS AS IS.
DID I ALWAYS HAVE SOMETHING LIKE THIS AMONG MY STUFF?

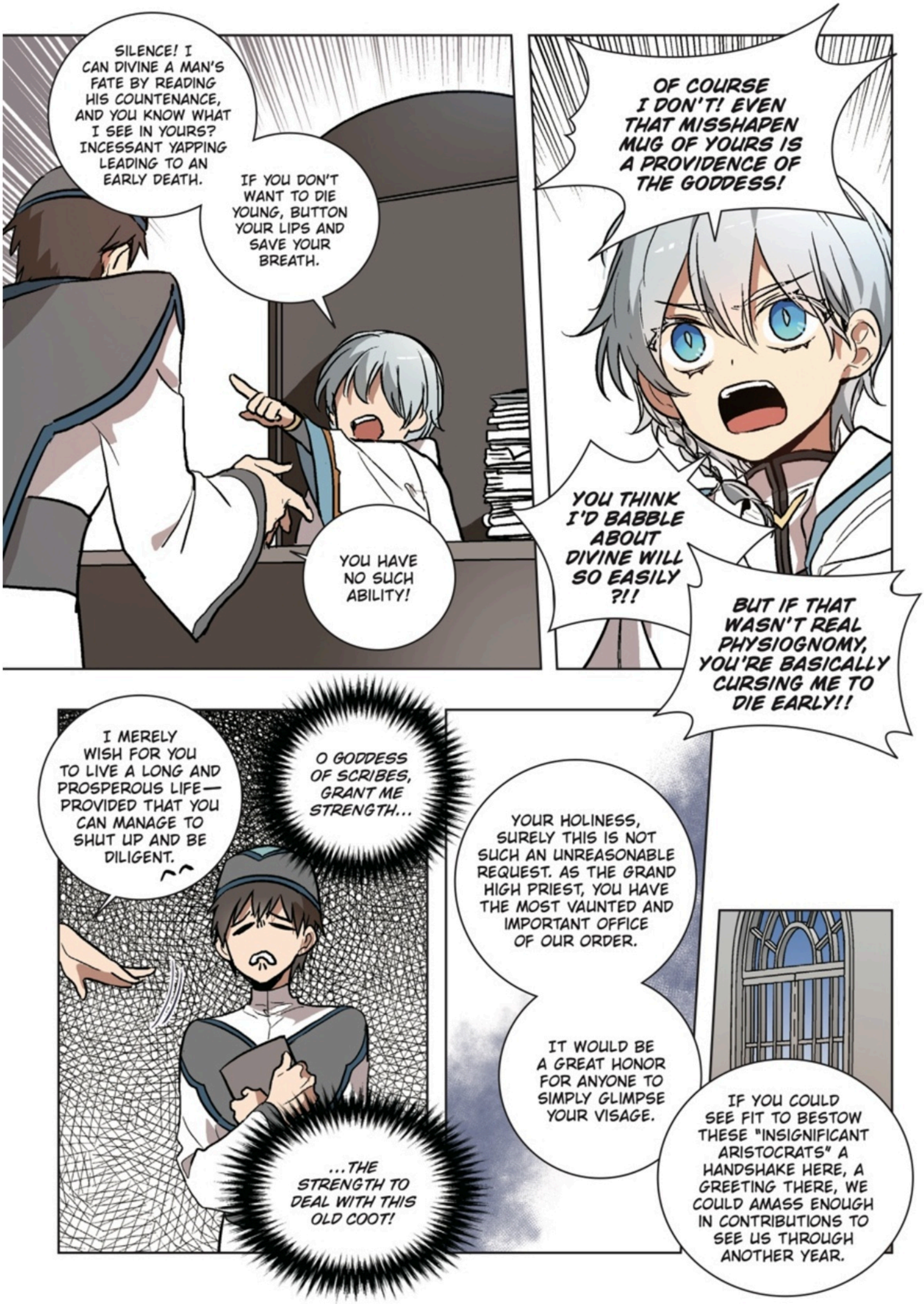

THEY'RE WAITING TO DEPART NOW, LADY McMILLAN. ARE YOU READY?
YEAH.
SLP


HOLY FATHER.
SCRITCH
FATHER HEIKA, THE PROCESSION FROM THE MONSTER HUNT WILL BE ARRIVING BEFORE THE TEMPLE SHORTLY.
YOU REALLY HAVE NO INTENTION TO GO GREET THEM?
WHY SHOULD I GO OUT THERE JUST TO SEE SOME INSIGNIFICANT ARISTOCRATS?
TINK
BECAUSE, FATHER, THEY'RE MORE THAN "SOME INSIGNIFICANT ARISTOCRATS."
THEY'RE AMONG THE FOREMOST HIGH-RANKING NOBLES OF THE KINGDOM OF CHAMUS.
YAAAWN...
HE'S NOT EVEN PRETENDING TO LISTEN...
WELL, I EXPECTED AS MUCH. THE HOLY FATHER HAS A KEEN DISTASTE FOR NOBLES, WHO HE REGARDS AS "SELF-IMPORTANT FOOLS."


STILL, I CAN'T BACK DOWN THIS TIME—I HAVE TOO IMPORTANT A PURPOSE...!
YOUR HOLINESS, I IMPLORE YOU TO RECONSIDER.
THE TEMPLE ORDER'S COFFERS ARE CONTINUOUSLY DWINDLING.
THERE'S GREAT UNEASE AMONG OUR FLOCK IN THE WAKE OF THE OUTRAGEOUS RUMORS THAT OUR DONATIONS ARE FUNDING MILITANT EXTREMIST GROUPS.
HOWEVER, THE CHAMUS MONSTER HUNT WAS HELD AT AN OPPORTUNE EARLY TIME THIS YEAR!
AS IT STANDS, OFFERINGS HAVE, UNSURPRISINGLY, DIMINISHED. THE ORDER'S INTERNAL ENTERPRISES ARE FALTERING AS WELL.
THIS IS WHEN NOBLES MAKE THEIR MONETARY CONTRIBUTIONS IN SUPPORT OF US!
NOT TO MENTION, RIGHT NOW IN THIS VERY TEMPLE...


...RESIDES GRAND HIGH PRIEST HEIKA DEMINT!
THE LEGENDARY THEOLOGIAN, ANTHOLOGIST OF ALL KNOWN FAITHS, AUTHOR OF THE MODERN PARADIGM!
HIM MERELY SHOWING HIS FACE WOULD SURELY INSPIRE DONATIONS TO POUR IN.
THERE ARE MANY WHO WOULD PLEDGE ALL THEY OWN JUST FOR A BLESSING FROM HIS HOLINESS—KINGS WHO'D OFFER UP THEIR ENTIRE DOMAINS!
AND WHY OUGHT I CARE ONE IOTA ABOUT ANY OF THIS, YOU FECES-BRAINED-FOOL?
"FECES"...!
HOLD IT IN. IF I RELENT NOW, THE TEMPLE WILL...!!

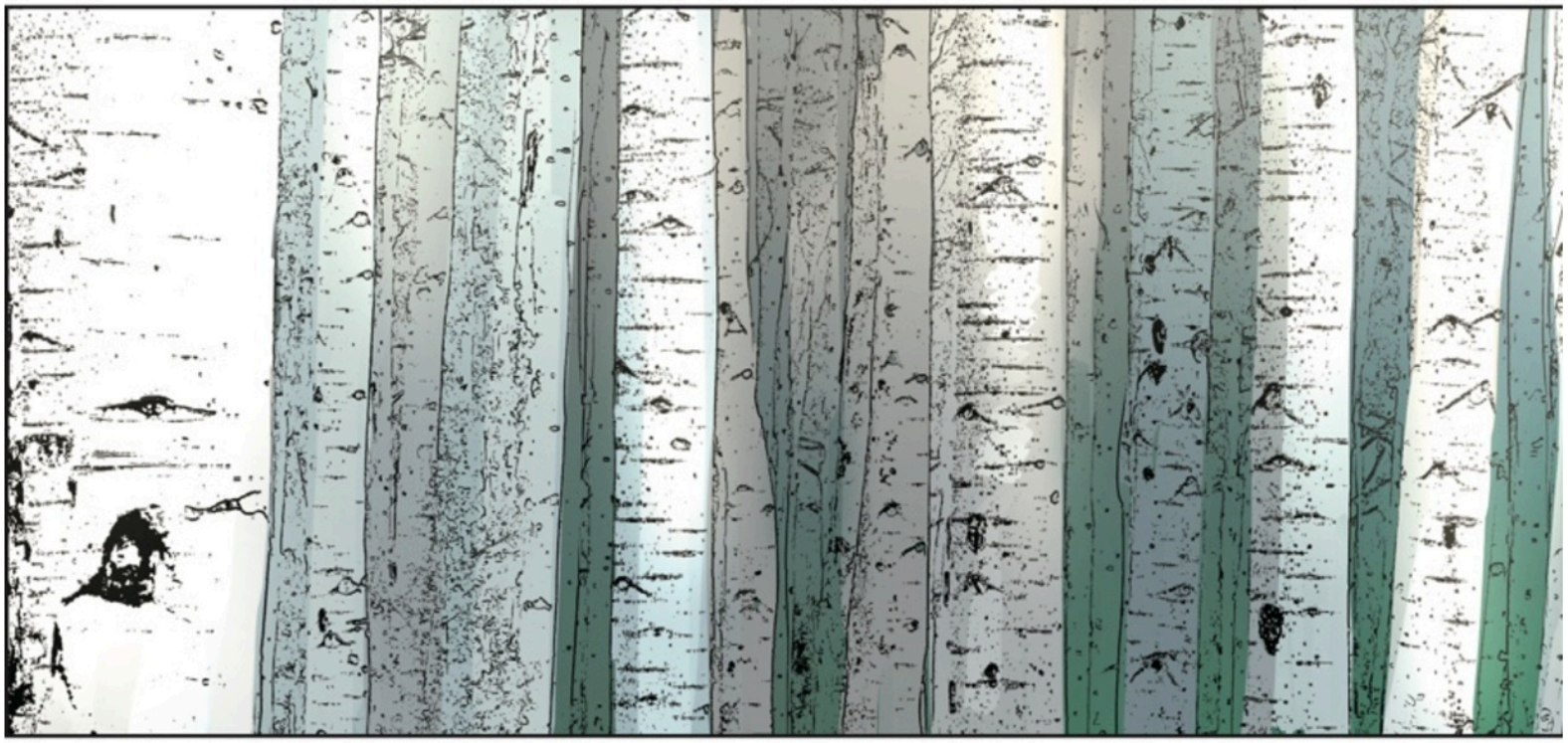
SUCH FEW OFFERINGS WILL NOT ONLY MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO RECRUIT AND TRAIN NEW CLERGY MEMBERS BUT ALSO SEVERELY IMPEDE THEOLOGICAL RESEARCH.
I KNOW HE'S SECRETLY BEEN WANTING TO HAVE A DISCIPLE OF HIS OWN...
IF YOU WERE COMPETENT, I COULD'VE SIMPLY MADE YOU MY DISCIPLE AND SAVED FIVE YEARS OF WORK—THAT'S FIVE YEARS' FINANCIAL EXPENDITURE WASTED.
YOU'RE BLAMING ME?!
WELL, OF COURSE YOU'RE TO BLAME FOR BEING SO DULL-WITTED. ARE YOU SAYING I SHOULD BLAME MYSELF FOR BEING SO BRIGHT?
NOT SPEAKING A LANGUAGE KNOWN BY ONLY THREE PEOPLE IN THE WORLD IS HARDLY GROUNDS TO CALL ME DIM.
I, WADE DAVIS, AM A TOP GRADUATE FROM THE PIART INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY! I MAY NOT BE A GENIUS LIKE YOURSELF, BUT I MOST CERTAINLY AM A GIFTED ACADEMIC IN MY OWN RIGHT!
SO THEY JUST ADMIT ANY DOLT WHO COMES ALONG NOWADAYS?
IT CERTAINLY WASN'T LIKE THAT BACK IN MY DAY.
YOUR HOLINESS!!!


SILENCE! I CAN DIVINE A MAN'S FATE BY READING HIS COUNTENANCE, AND YOU KNOW WHAT I SEE IN YOURS? INCESSANT YAPPING LEADING TO AN EARLY DEATH.
IF YOU DON'T WANT TO DIE YOUNG, BUTTON YOUR LIPS AND SAVE YOUR BREATH.
YOU HAVE NO SUCH ABILITY!
OF COURSE I DON'T! EVEN THAT MISSHAPEN MUG OF YOURS IS A PROVIDENCE OF THE GODDESS!
YOU THINK I'D BABBLE ABOUT DIVINE WILL SO EASILY ?!!
BUT IF THAT WASN'T REAL PHYSIOGNOMY, YOU'RE BASICALLY CURSING ME TO DIE EARLY!!
I MERELY WISH FOR YOU TO LIVE A LONG AND PROSPEROUS LIFE— PROVIDED THAT YOU CAN MANAGE TO SHUT UP AND BE DILIGENT.
O GODDESS OF SCRIBES, GRANT ME STRENGTH...
...THE STRENGTH TO DEAL WITH THIS OLD COOT!
YOUR HOLINESS, SURELY THIS IS NOT SUCH AN UNREASONABLE REQUEST. AS THE GRAND HIGH PRIEST, YOU HAVE THE MOST VAUNTED AND IMPORTANT OFFICE OF OUR ORDER.
IT WOULD BE A GREAT HONOR FOR ANYONE TO SIMPLY GLIMPSE YOUR VISAGE.
IF YOU COULD SEE FIT TO BESTOW THESE "INSIGNIFICANT ARISTOCRATS" A HANDSHAKE HERE, A GREETING THERE, WE COULD AMASS ENOUGH IN CONTRIBUTIONS TO SEE US THROUGH ANOTHER YEAR.

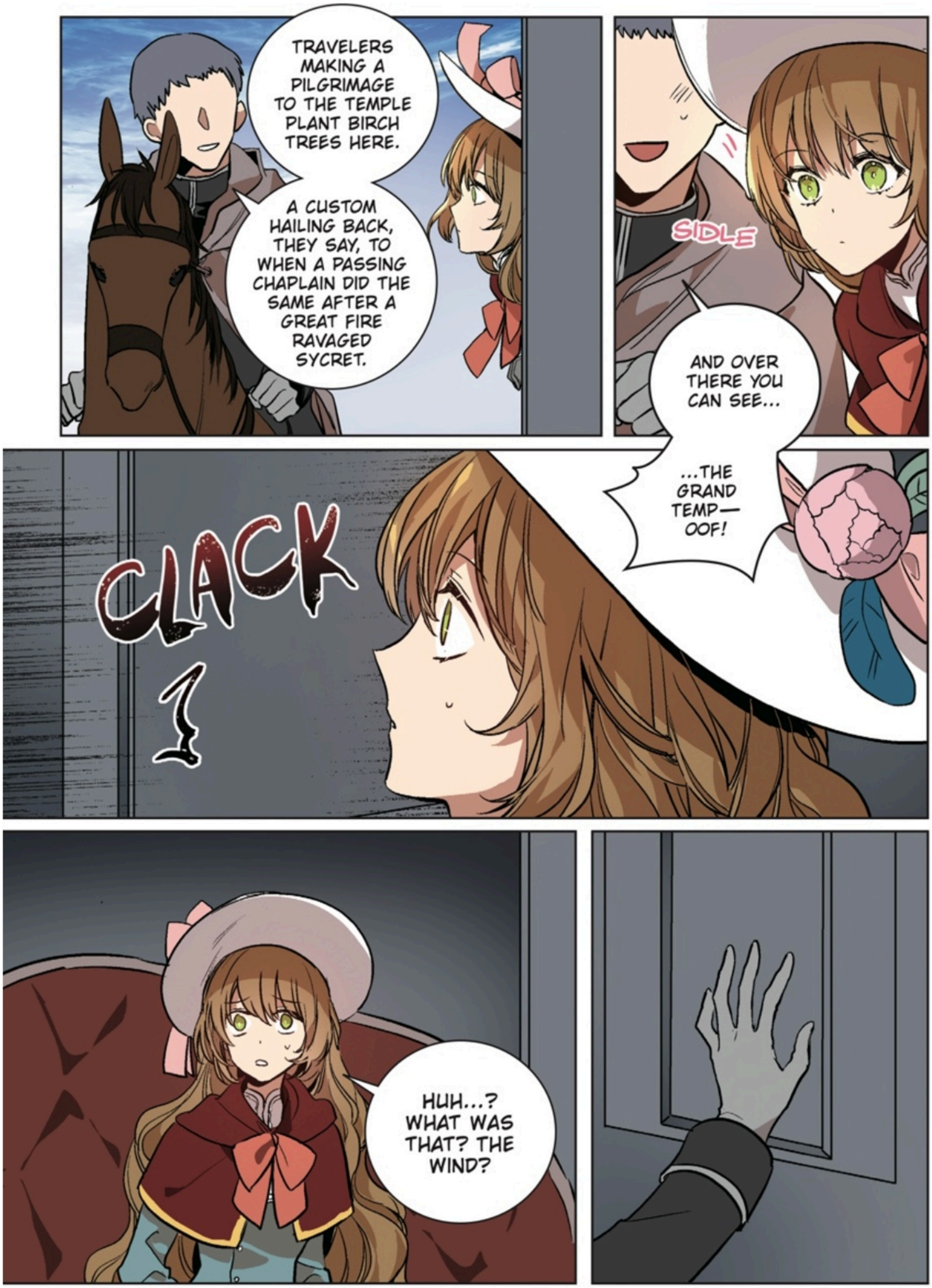
THERE, LET'S SEE IF THE PRIDEFUL OLD CRANK CAN RESIST SOME MODERATE EGO-STROKING.
HMM, I GUESS.
RIGHT?
I DID IT!
WADE, COME HERE.
WAVE
YES?

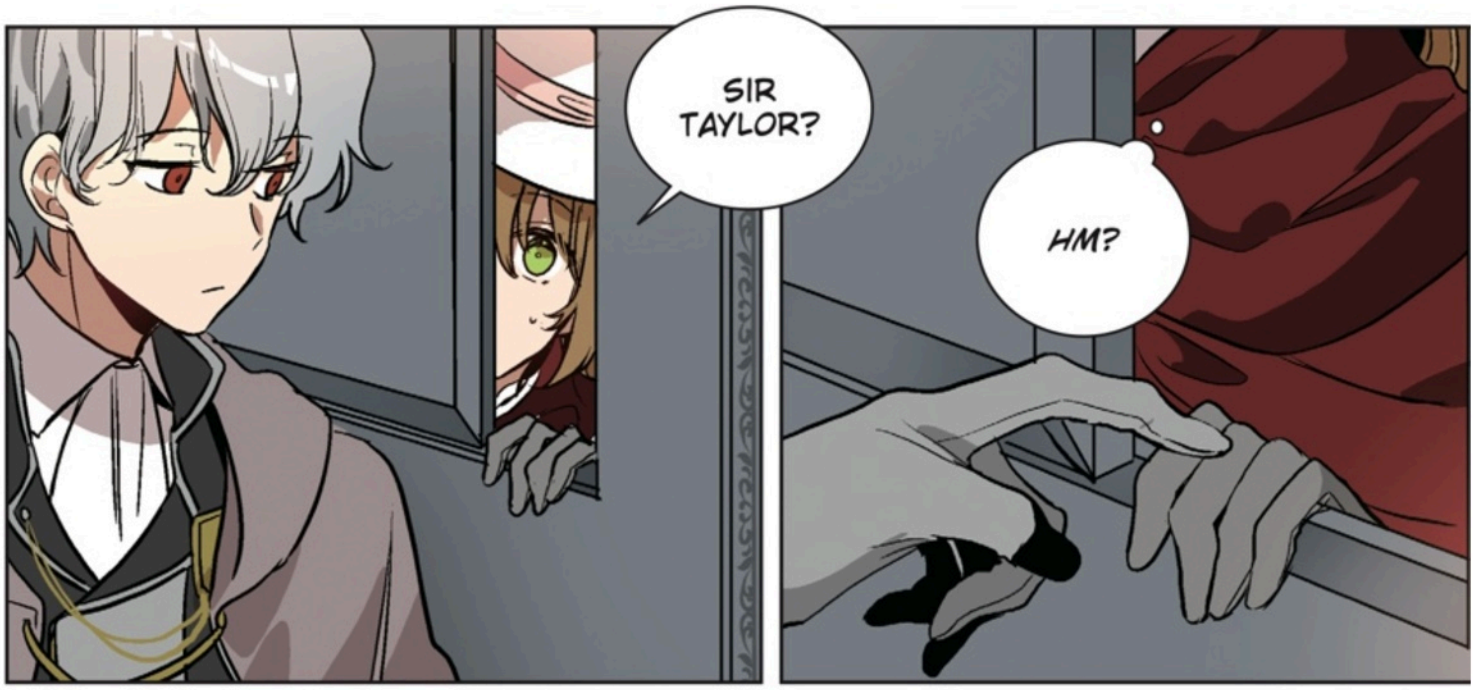
PLIP PLOP

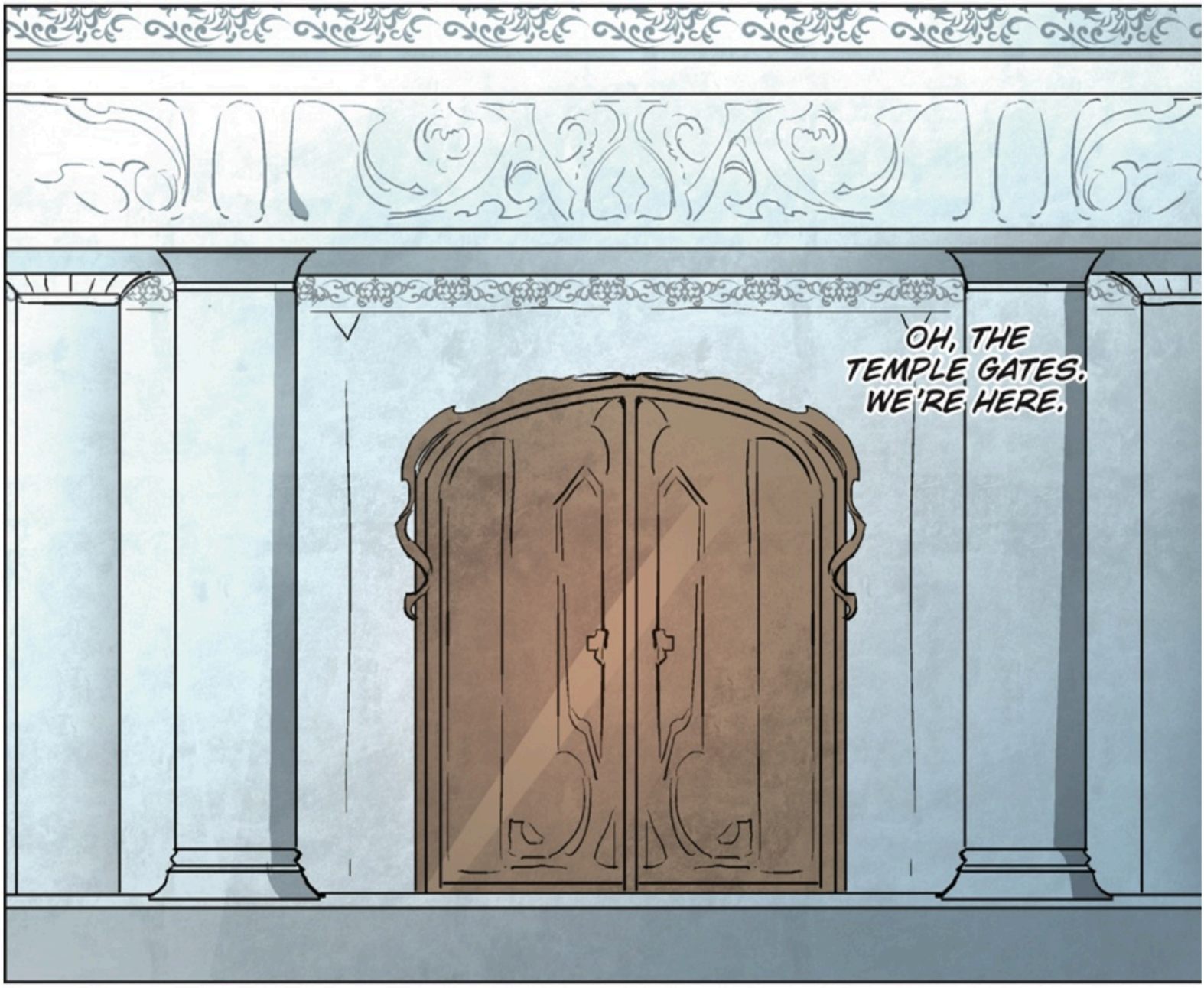
Why Raeliana Ended Up at the Duke's Mansion

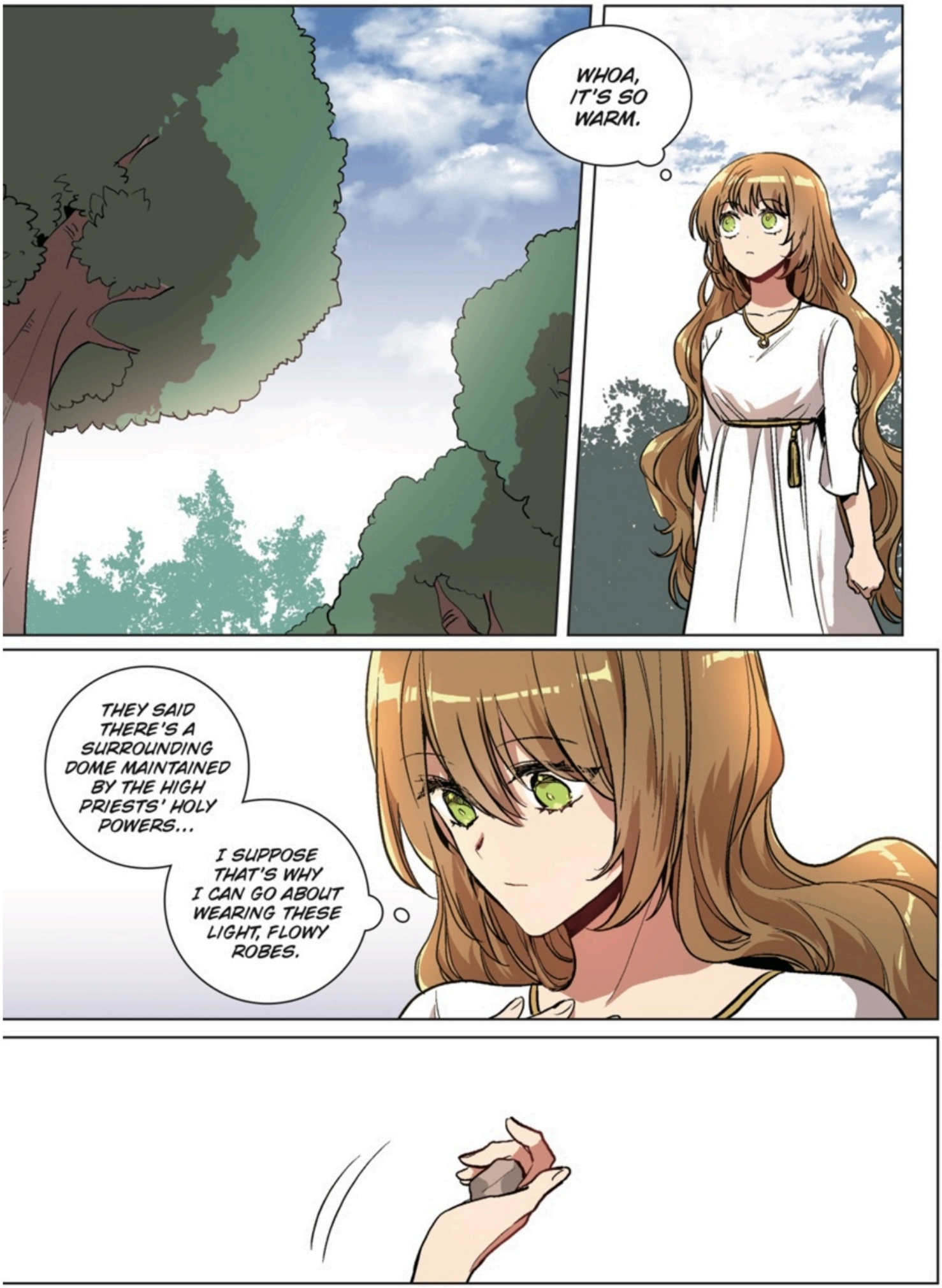


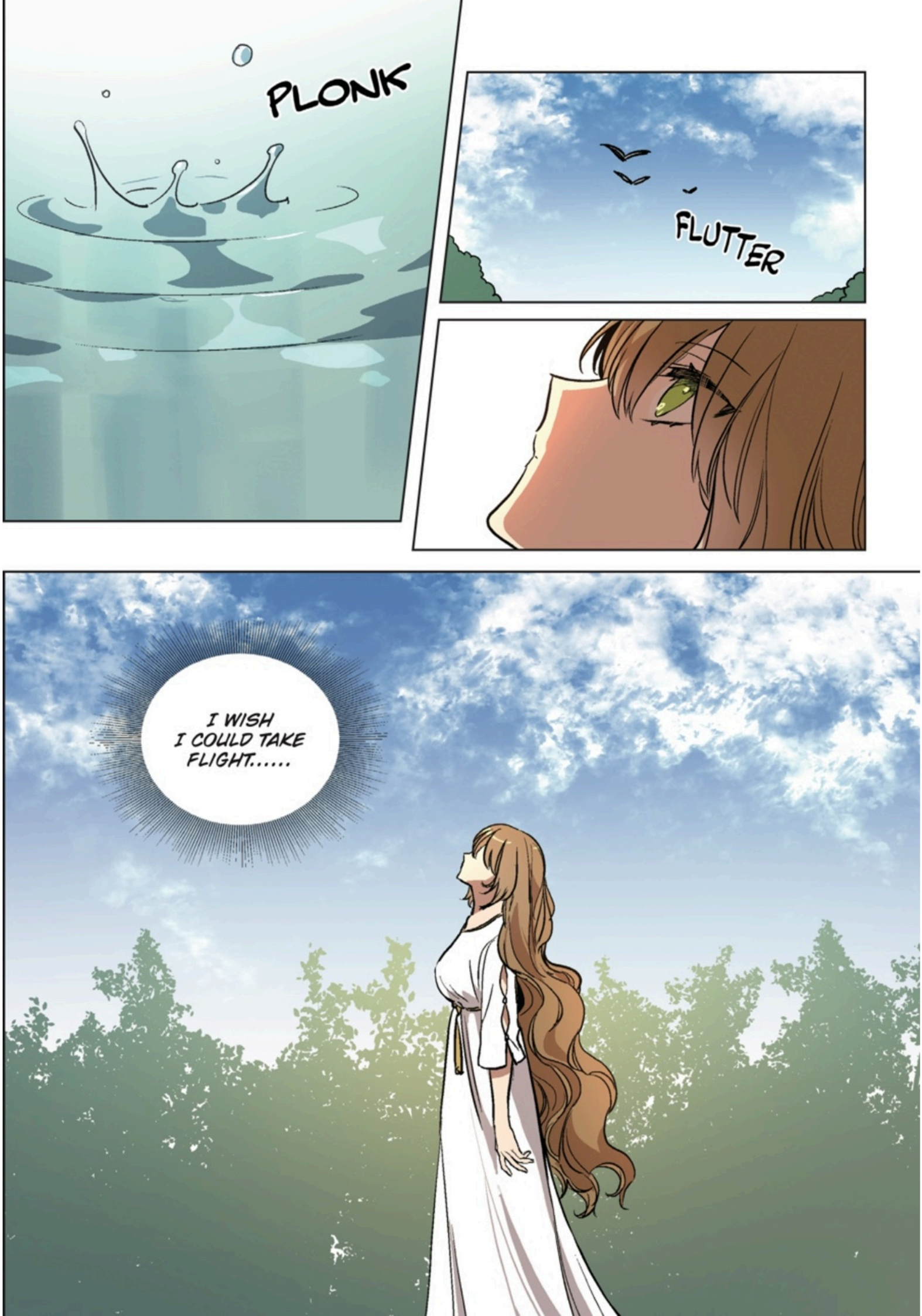
WOW.....!

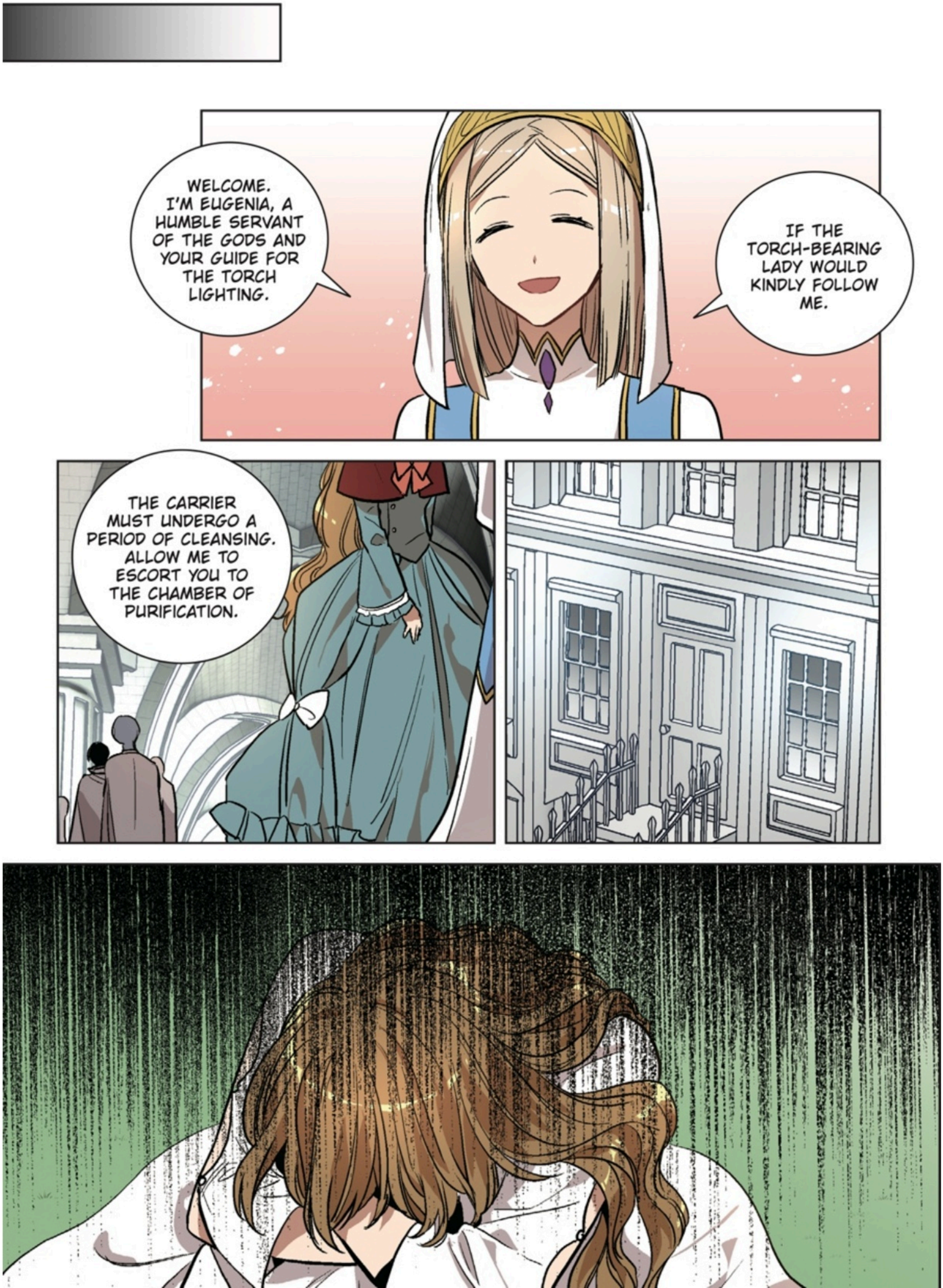

TRAVELERS MAKING A PILGRIMAGE TO THE TEMPLE PLANT BIRCH TREES HERE.
A CUSTOM HAILING BACK, THEY SAY, TO WHEN A PASSING CHAPLAIN DID THE SAME AFTER A GREAT FIRE RAVAGED SYCRET.
SIDLE
AND OVER THERE YOU CAN SEE...
...THE GRAND TEMP— OOF!
CLACK
HUH...? WHAT WAS THAT? THE WIND?

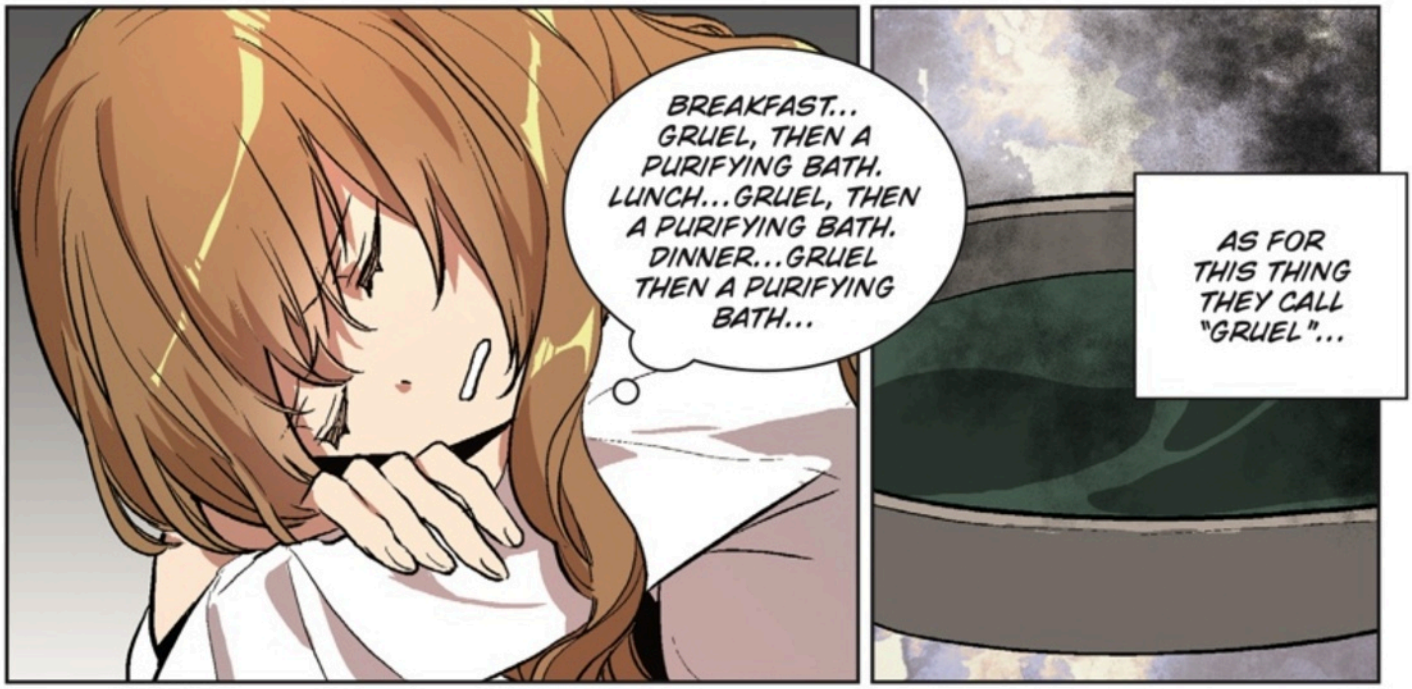

SIR TAYLOR?
HM?

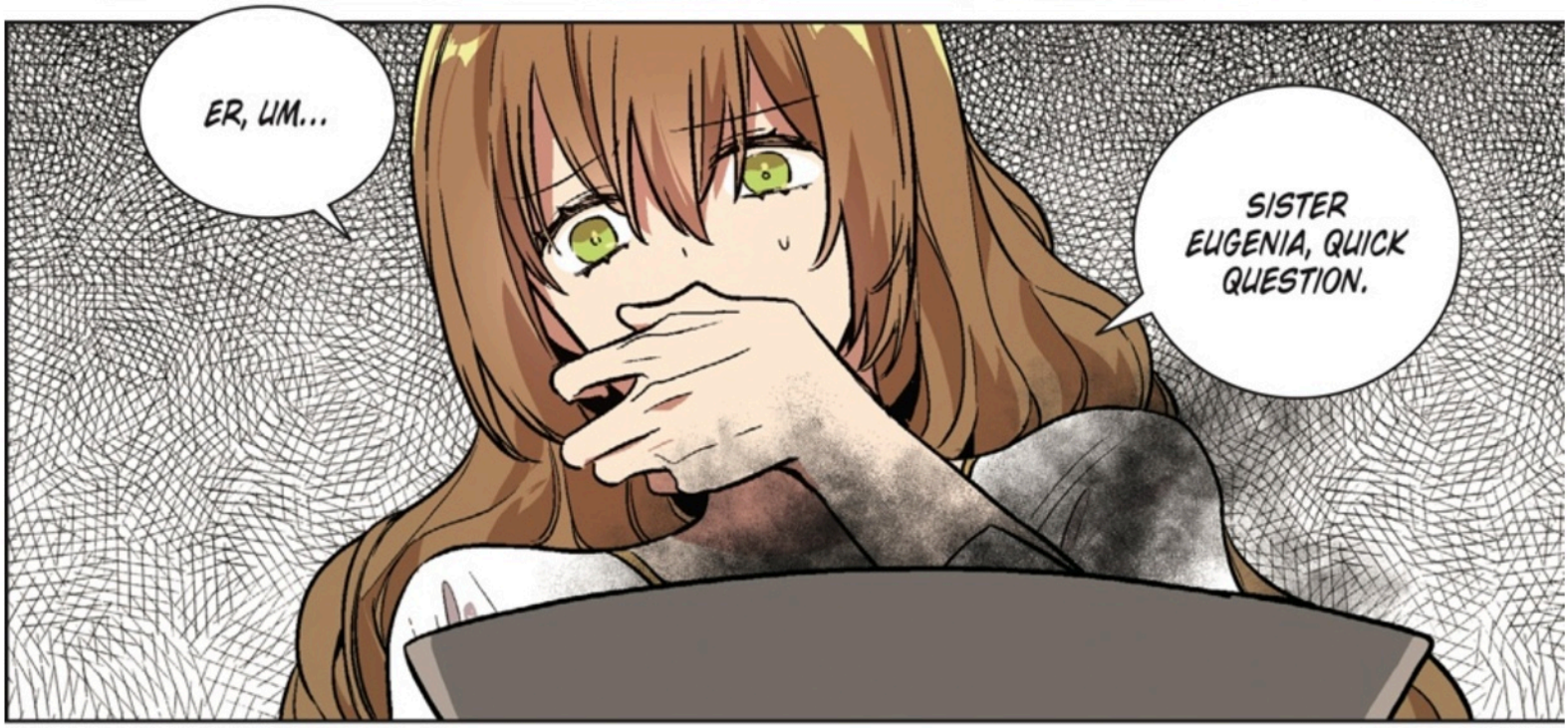

OH, THE TEMPLE GATES. WE'RE HERE.

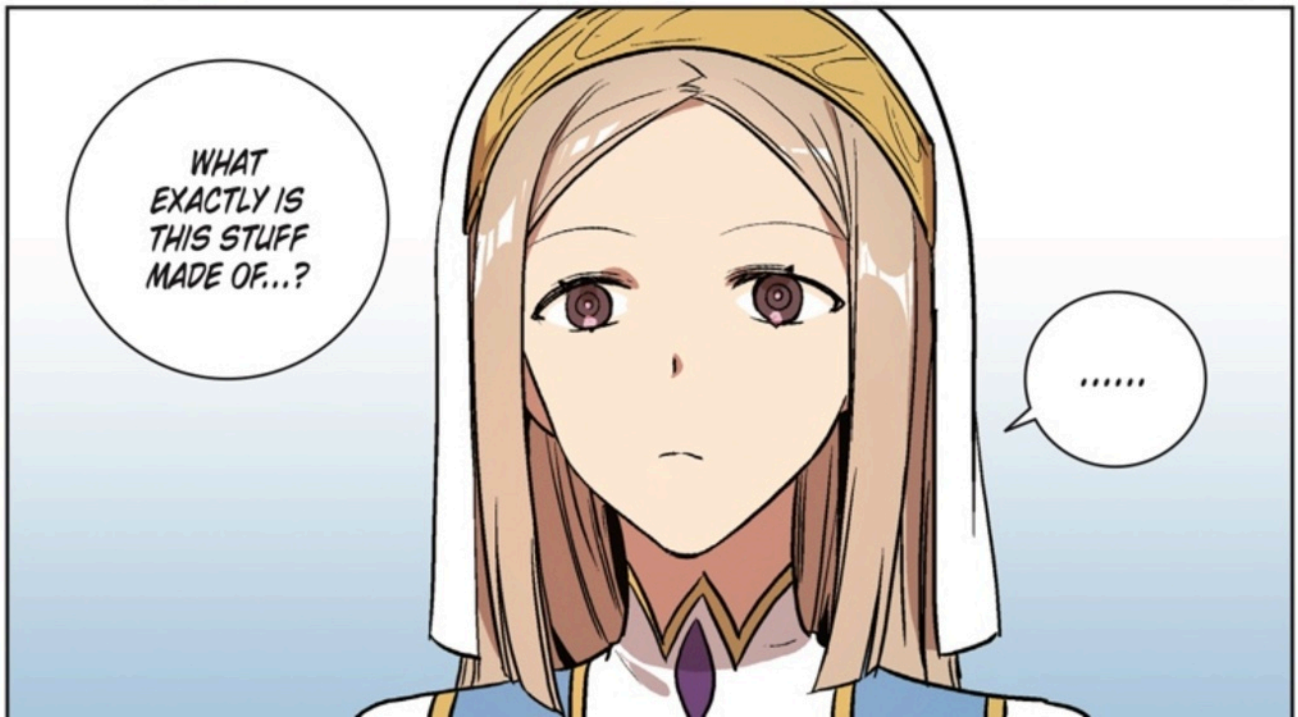

WHOA, IT'S SO WARM.
THEY SAID THERE'S A SURROUNDING DOME MAINTAINED BY THE HIGH PRIESTS' HOLY POWERS...
I SUPPOSE THAT'S WHY I CAN GO ABOUT WEARING THESE LIGHT, FLOWY ROBES.

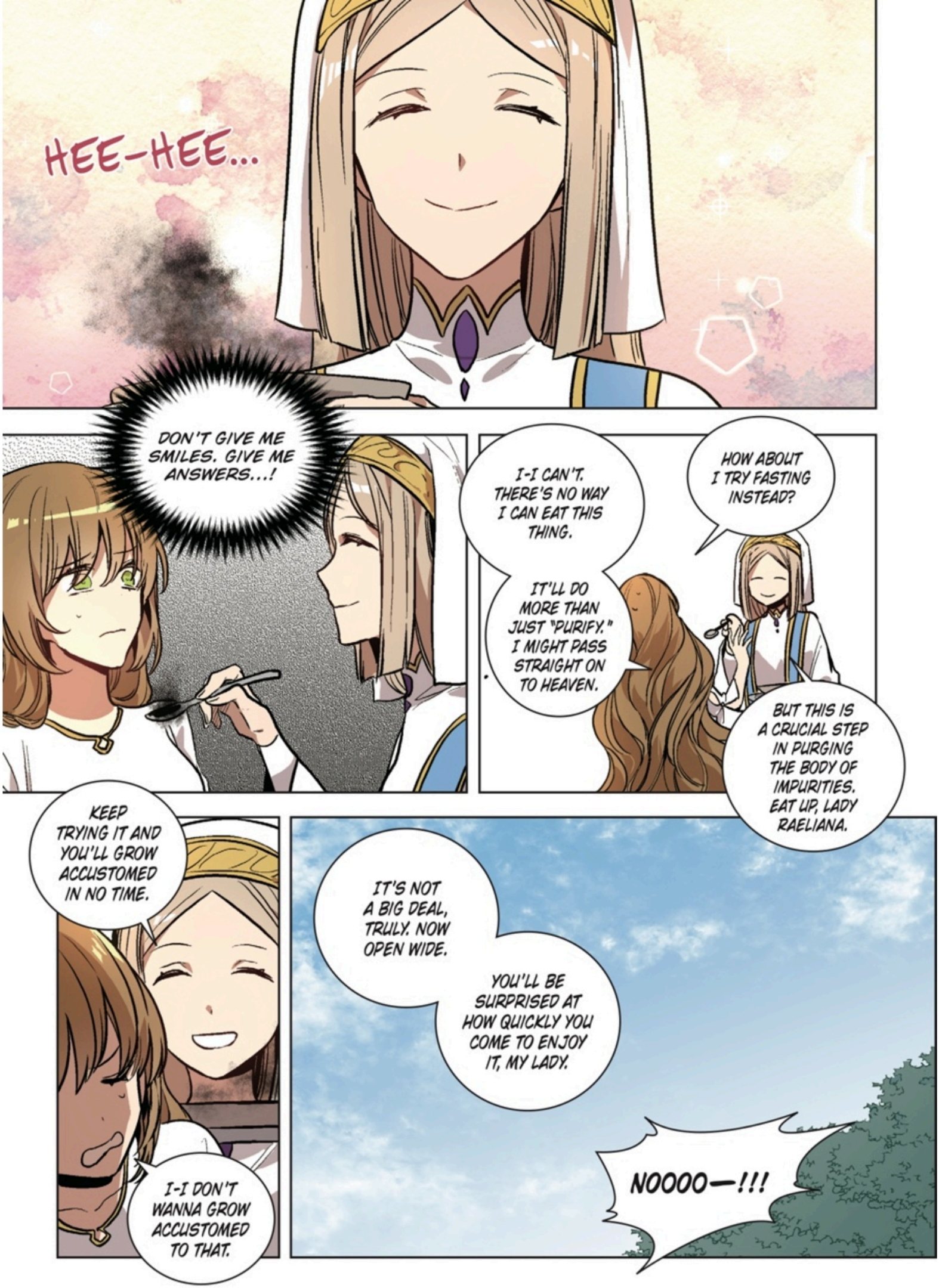

PLONK
FLUTTER
I WISH I COULD TAKE FLIGHT.....

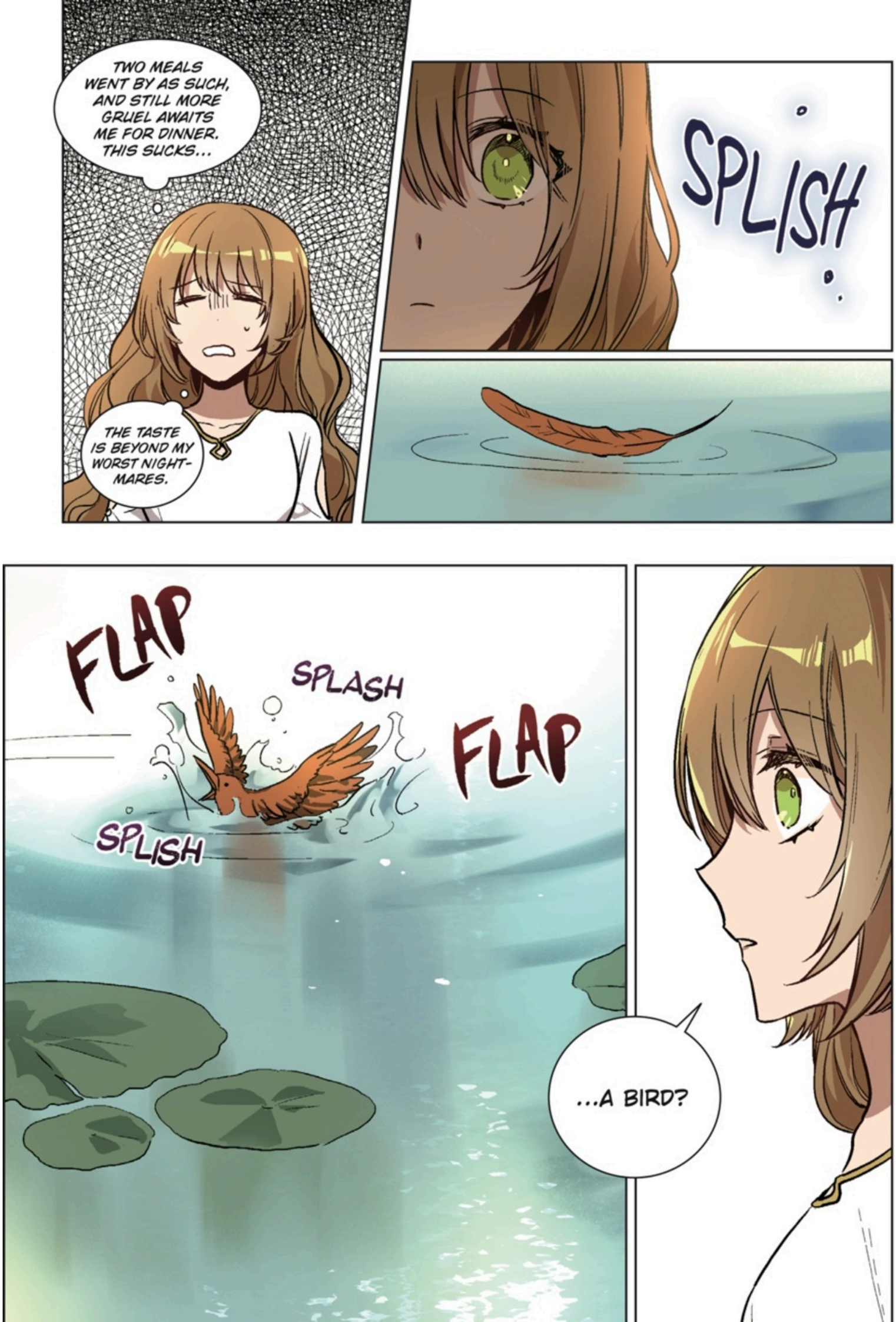

WELCOME. I'M EUGENIA, A HUMBLE SERVANT OF THE GODS AND YOUR GUIDE FOR THE TORCH LIGHTING.
IF THE TORCH-BEARING LADY WOULD KINDLY FOLLOW ME.
THE CARRIER MUST UNDERGO A PERIOD OF CLEANSING. ALLOW ME TO ESCORT YOU TO THE CHAMBER OF PURIFICATION.

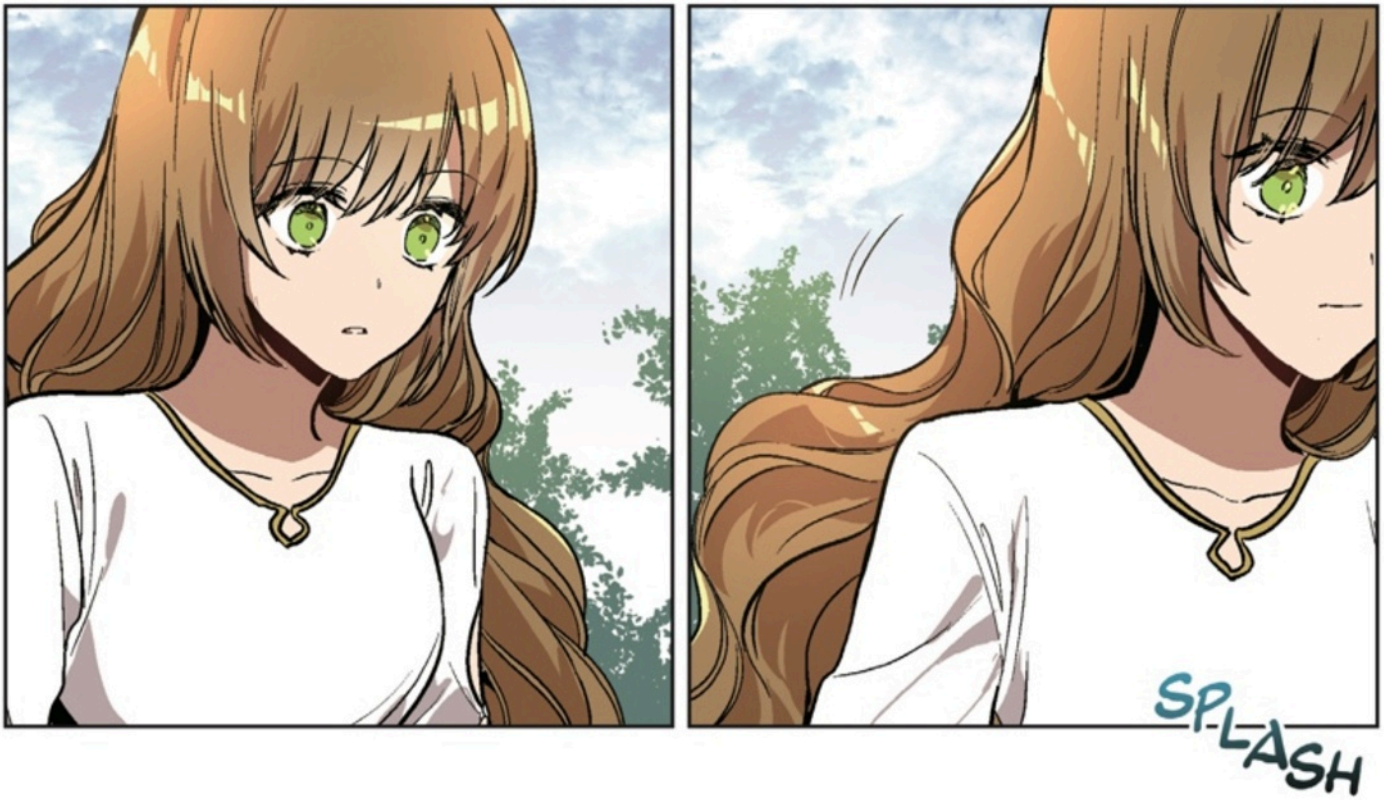

BREAKFAST... GRUEL, THEN A PURIFYING BATH. LUNCH...GRUEL, THEN A PURIFYING BATH. DINNER...GRUEL THEN A PURIFYING BATH...
AS FOR THIS THING THEY CALL "GRUEL"...

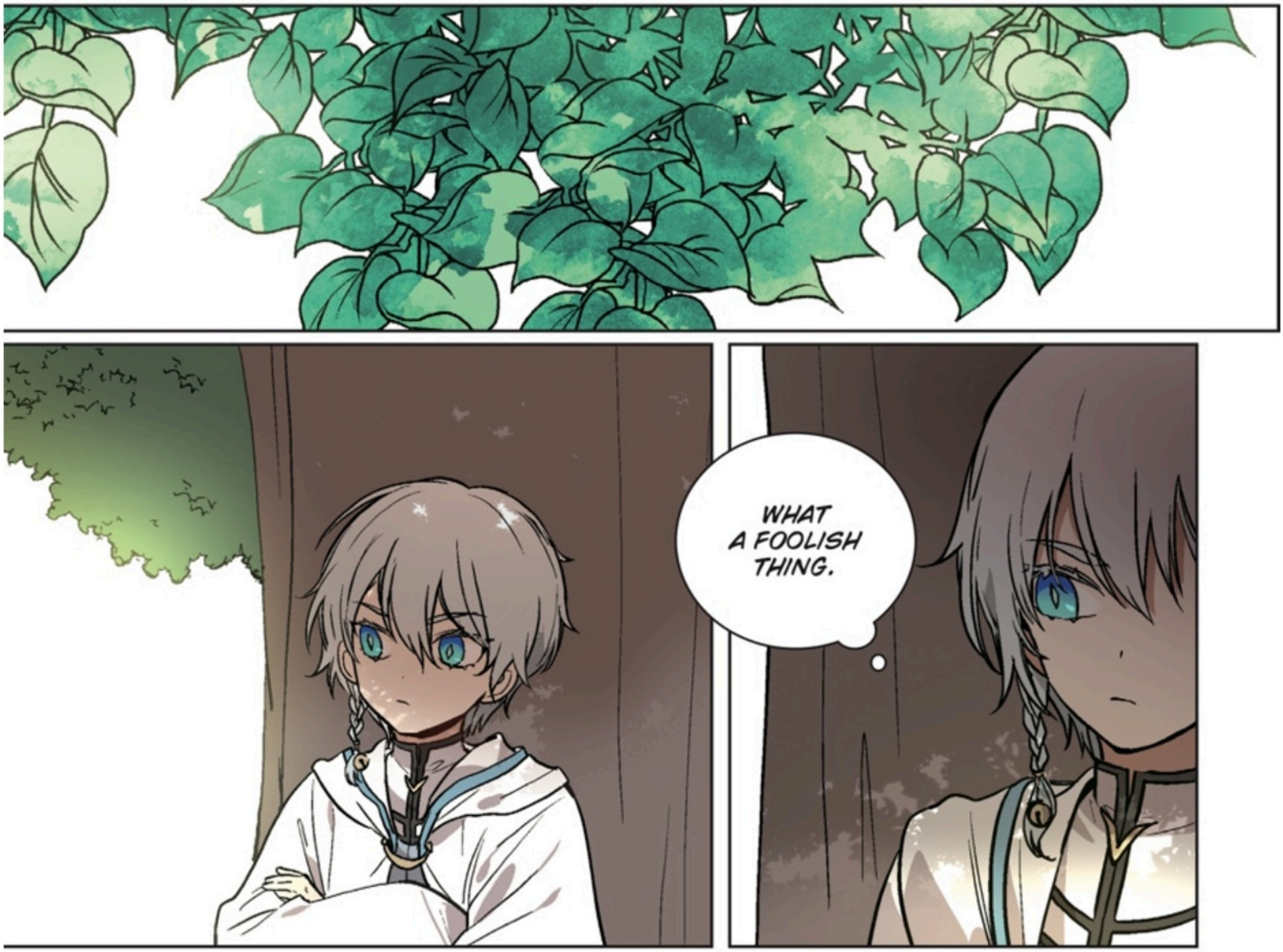

ER, UM...
SISTER EUGENIA, QUICK QUESTION.


WHAT EXACTLY IS THIS STUFF MADE OF...?
.....


HEE-HEE...
DON'T GIVE ME SMILES. GIVE ME ANSWERS...!
I-I CAN'T. THERE'S NO WAY I CAN EAT THIS THING.
HOW ABOUT I TRY FASTING INSTEAD?
IT'LL DO MORE THAN JUST "PURIFY." I MIGHT PASS STRAIGHT ON TO HEAVEN.
BUT THIS IS A CRUCIAL STEP IN PURGING THE BODY OF IMPURITIES. EAT UP, LADY RAELIANA.
KEEP TRYING IT AND YOU'LL GROW ACCUSTOMED IN NO TIME.
I-I DON'T WANNA GROW ACCUSTOMED TO THAT.
IT'S NOT A BIG DEAL, TRULY. NOW OPEN WIDE.
YOU'LL BE SURPRISED AT HOW QUICKLY YOU COME TO ENJOY IT, MY LADY.
NOOOO—!!!


TWO MEALS WENT BY AS SUCH, AND STILL MORE GRUEL AWAITS ME FOR DINNER. THIS SUCKS...
THE TASTE IS BEYOND MY WORST NIGHT-MARES.
SPLISH
FLAP
SPLASH
FLAP
SPLISH
...A BIRD?

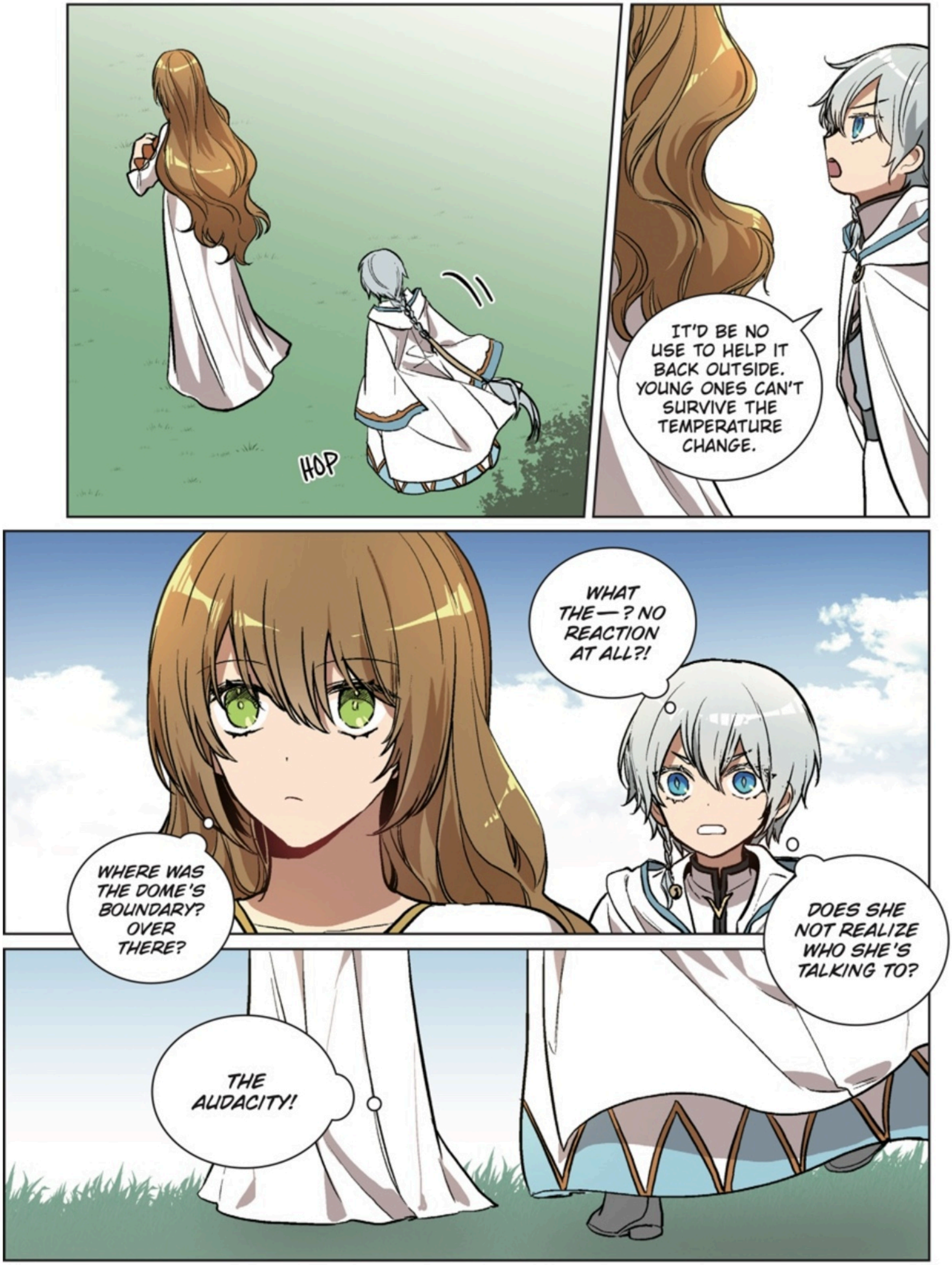

SPLASH

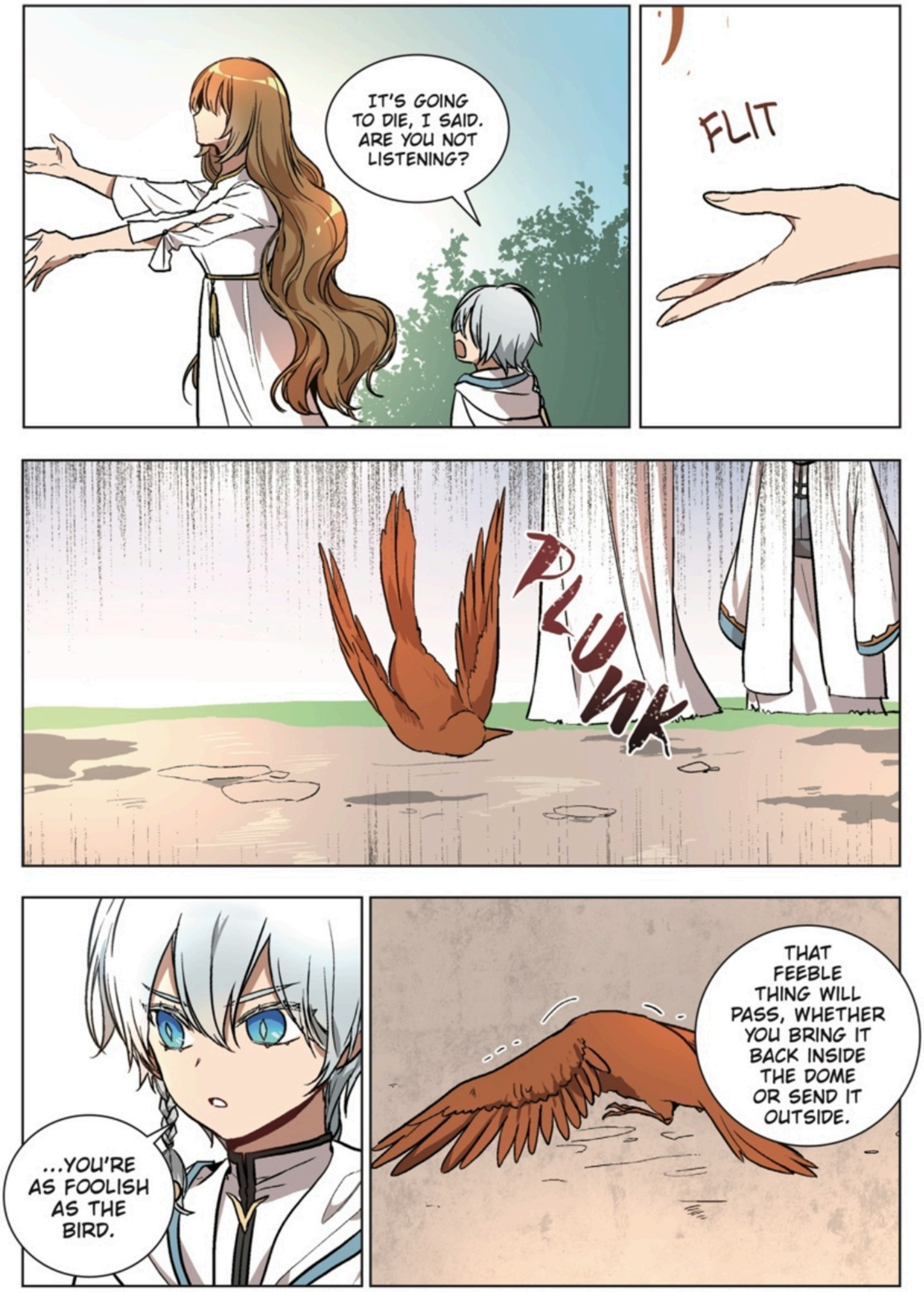

WHAT A FOOLISH THING.

WHETHER IT DROWNS IN THE WATER OR PERISHES WITHIN THE DOME, IT'S BUT ANOTHER INCONSEQUENTIAL, PITIABLE CREATURE DOOMED TO DEATH.
DID SOME WATER GO DOWN THE WRONG PIPE...?
HWIP
SHAKE SHAKE
SQUAWK
SQUAAAWK
THAT'S A BIJO.

THEY CAN ONLY FLY IN LOW TEMPERATURES. THE FULLY GROWN ONES ARE WISE ENOUGH TO AVOID OUR DOME, BUT...

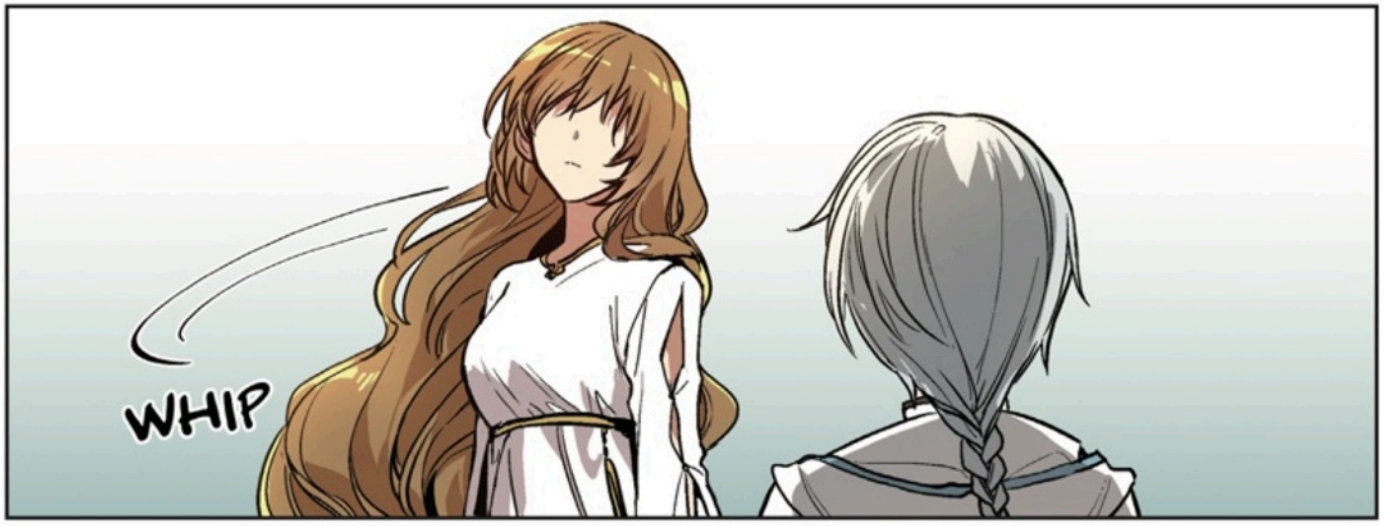
...OCCASIONALLY, FLEDGLINGS THAT CAN'T FLY AS HIGH WILL STRAY WITHIN OUR CONFINES AND PLUMMET. THAT ONE WILL DIE SOON.


HOP
IT'D BE NO USE TO HELP IT BACK OUTSIDE. YOUNG ONES CAN'T SURVIVE THE TEMPERATURE CHANGE.
WHAT THE—? NO REACTION AT ALL?!
WHERE WAS THE DOME'S BOUNDARY? OVER THERE?
DOES SHE NOT REALIZE WHO SHE'S TALKING TO?
THE AUDACITY!


IT'S GOING TO DIE, I SAID. ARE YOU NOT LISTENING?
FLIT
PLUNK
...YOU'RE AS FOOLISH AS THE BIRD.
THAT FEEBLE THING WILL PASS, WHETHER YOU BRING IT BACK INSIDE THE DOME OR SEND IT OUTSIDE.

ITS FATE WAS SEALED THE MOMENT IT ENTERED.

FATE.....


WHIP

HEH.

REACH

AREN'T YOU A LITTLE DEVIL.
SMOO
OOSH

?!

IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT IT'S FATED TO DO.
IF IT HAS THE WILL, IT CAN LIVE.

A PIP-SQUEAK LIKE YOU GOING ON ABOUT DEATH LIKE SOME OLD SAGE! IS THIS HOW THEY TEACH TEMPLE KIDS TO SPEAK? HMM?
SQUEEZE
SQUEEZE
WHO DARES TO MANHANDLE ME LIKE THIS?! ME! THE LIVING LEGEND OF THE ORDER!

Y-YOU BRAZEN LITTLE BRAT!
EXCUSE ME, WHO'S THE BRAT HERE? YOU'RE, LIKE, MY BABY SISTER ROSEMARY'S AGE. LEARN HOW TO ADDRESS PEOPLE— MISS, MA'AM, Y'KNOW.

YOU FIEND! DON'T YOU KNOW WHO I AM?!

AND DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM? GEEZ, THE NERVE—

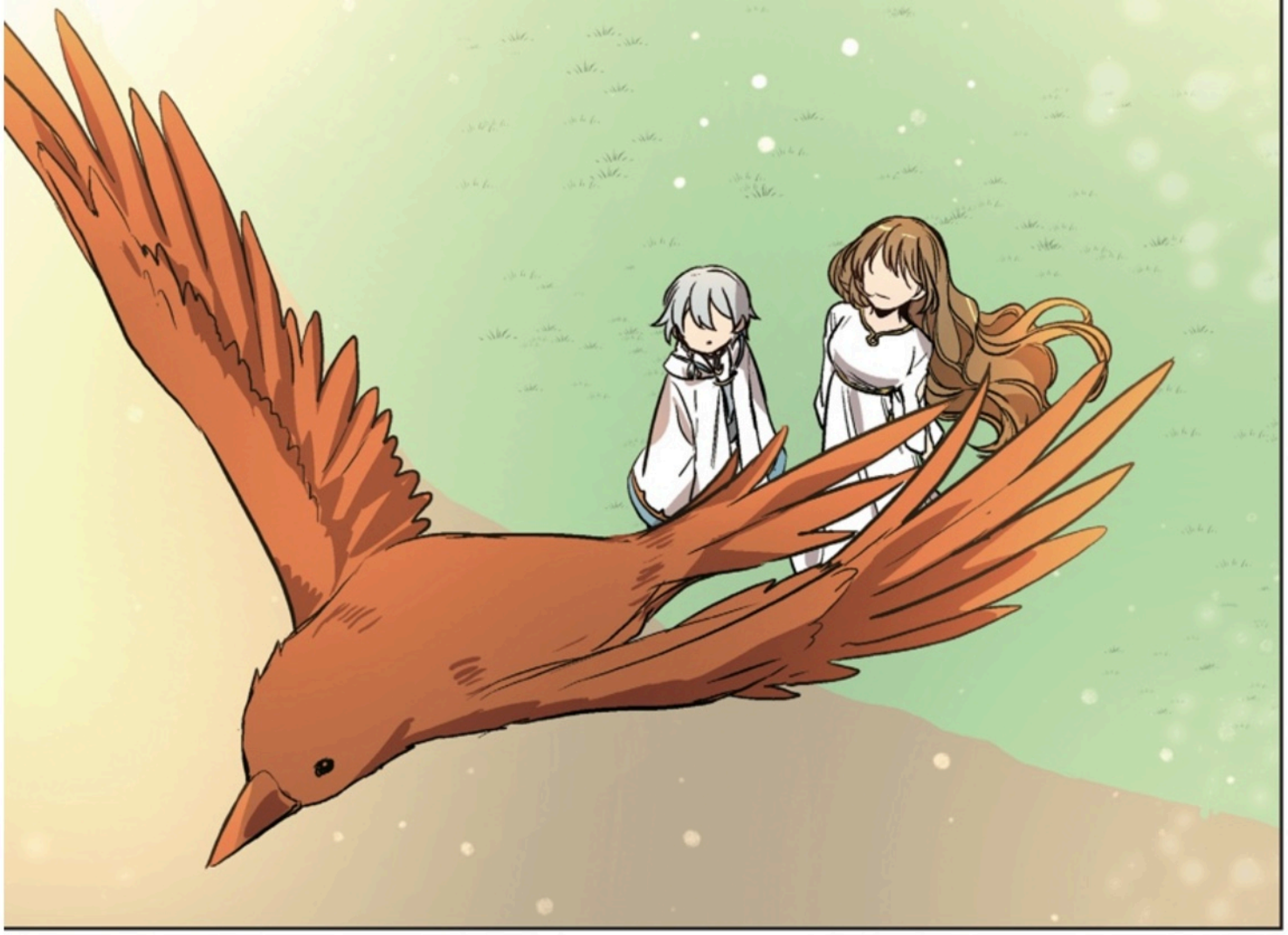
OH!

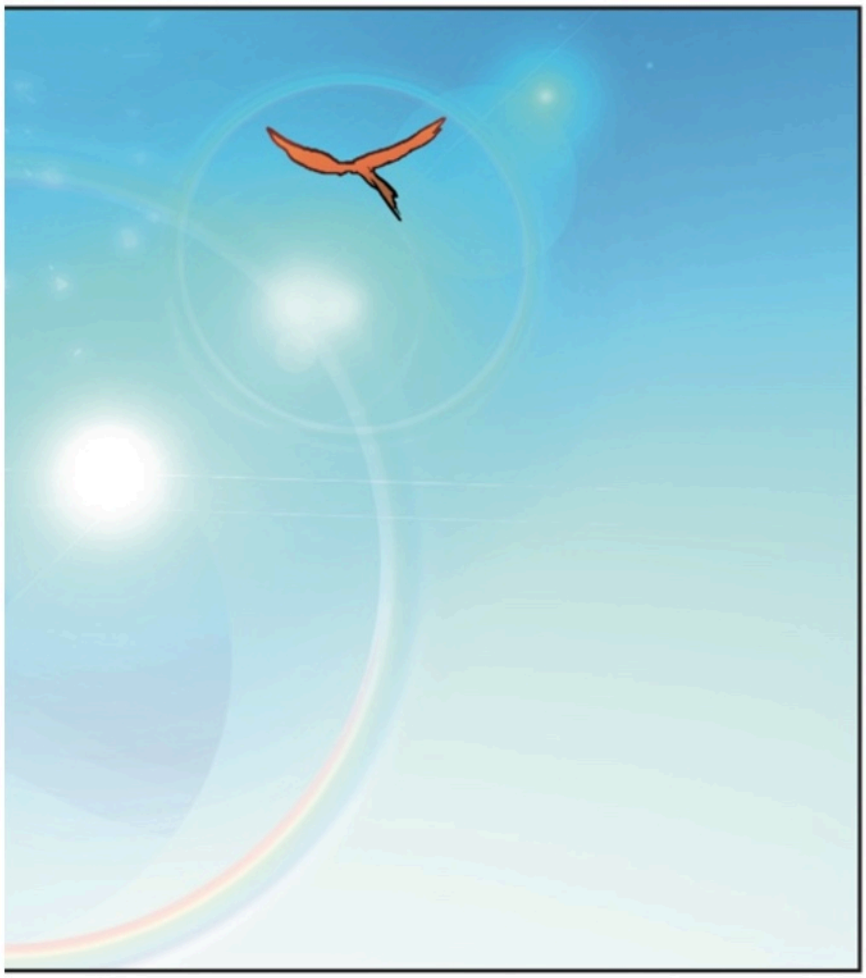
YOU STAND IN THE PRESENCE OF HEIKA HIMSELF!

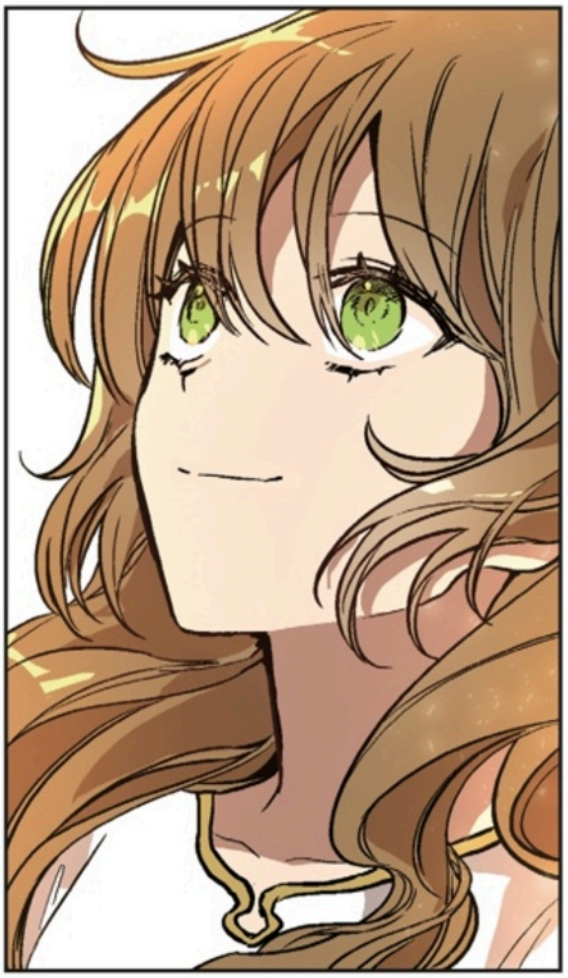
IT'S FLYING.

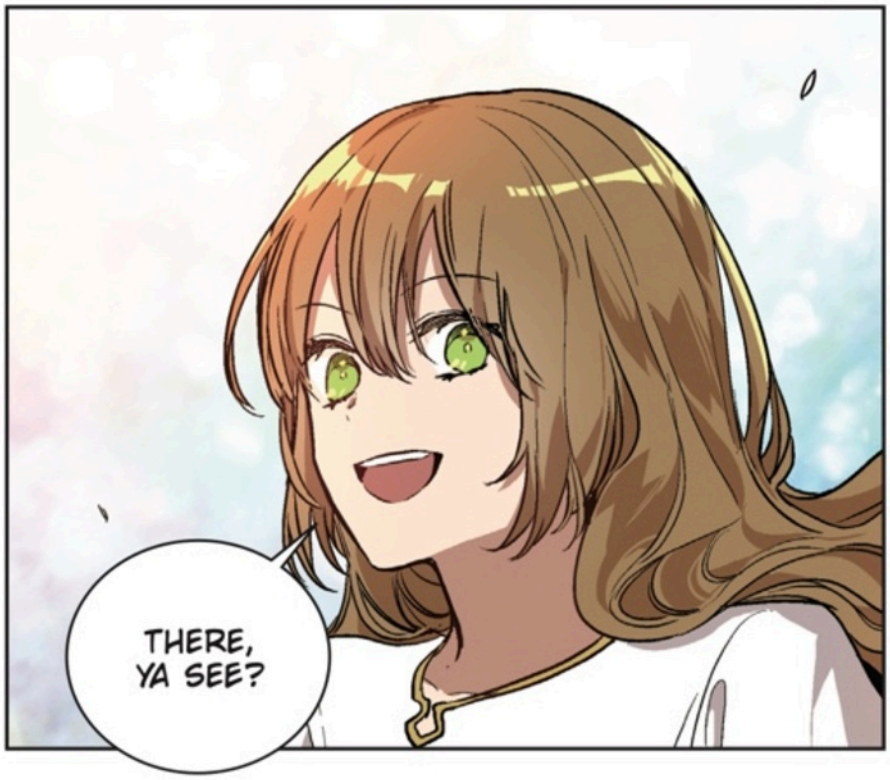
.....?

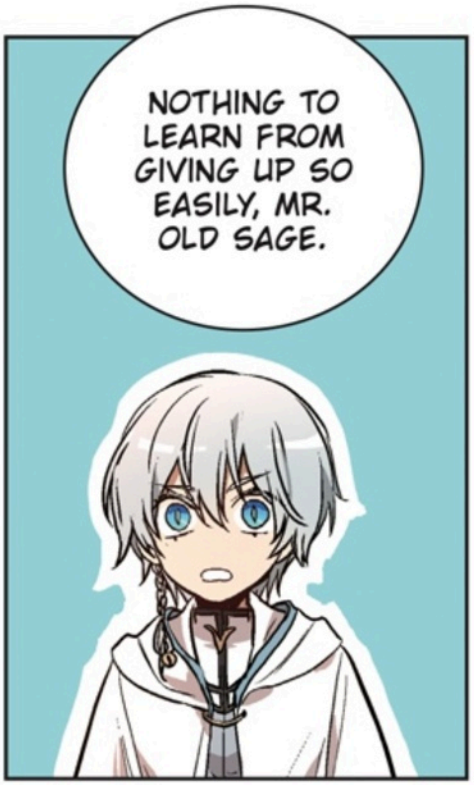
FLAP



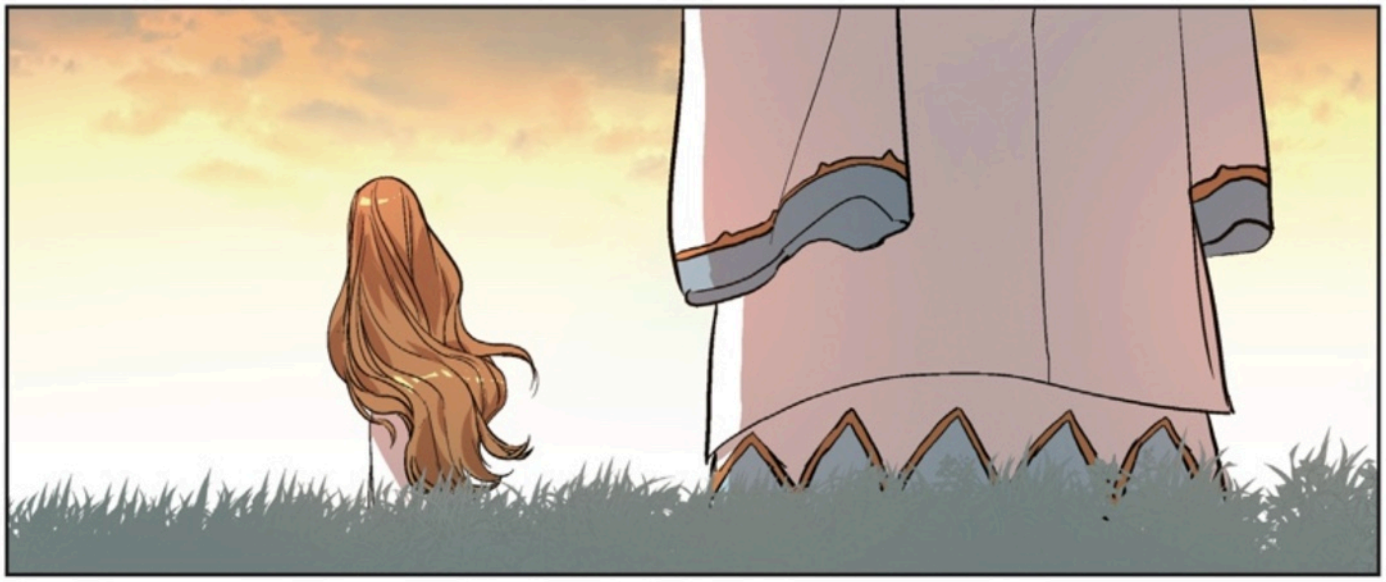


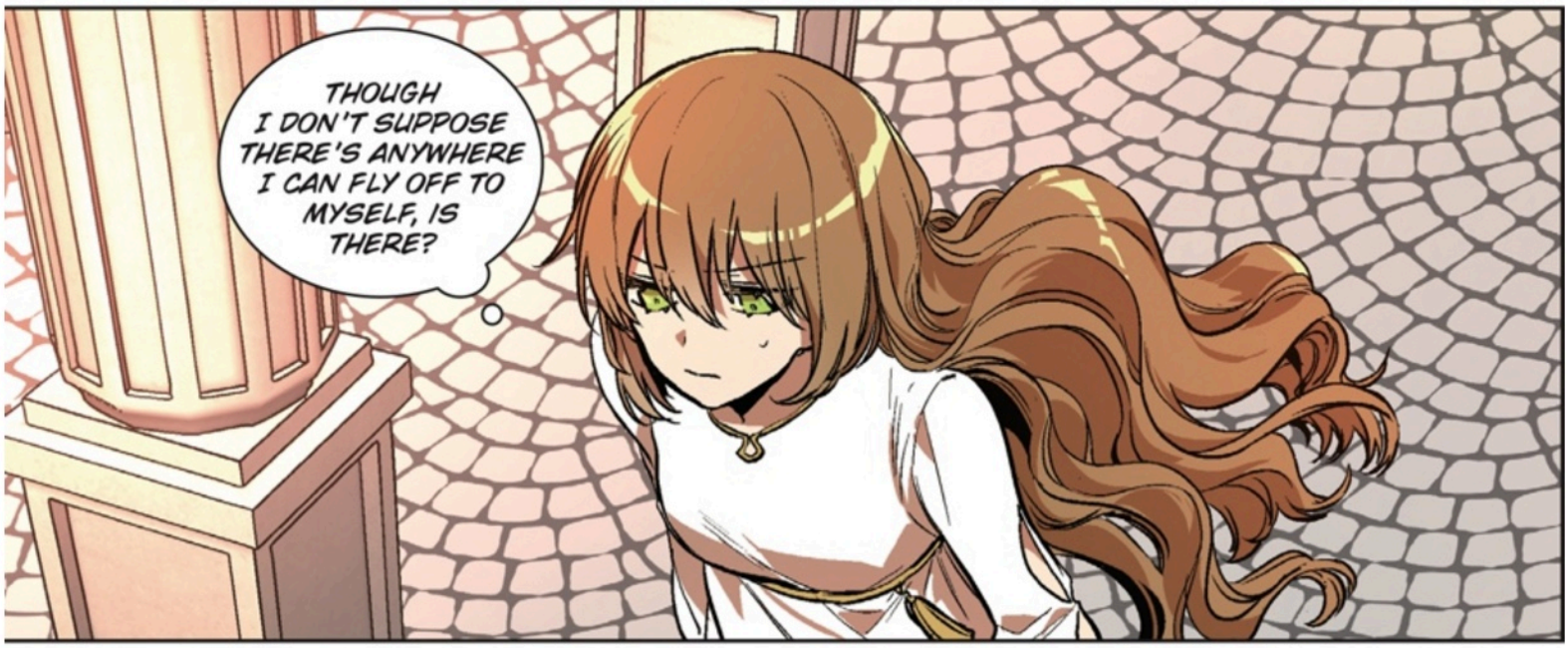



THERE, YA SEE?

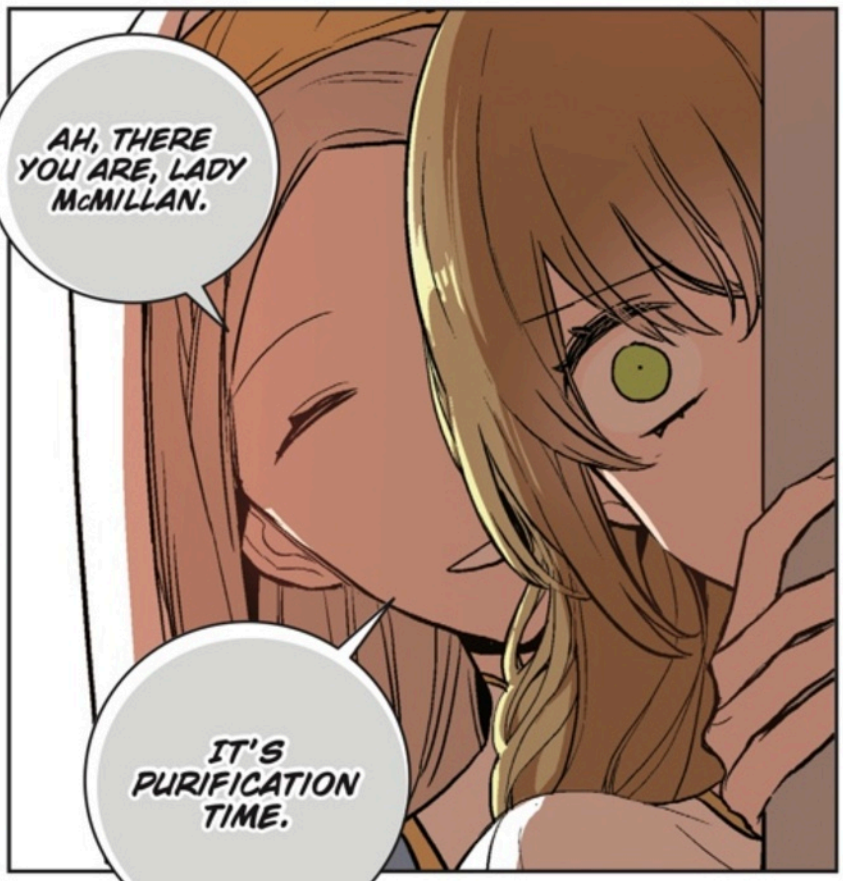

NOTHING TO LEARN FROM GIVING UP SO EASILY, MR. OLD SAGE.

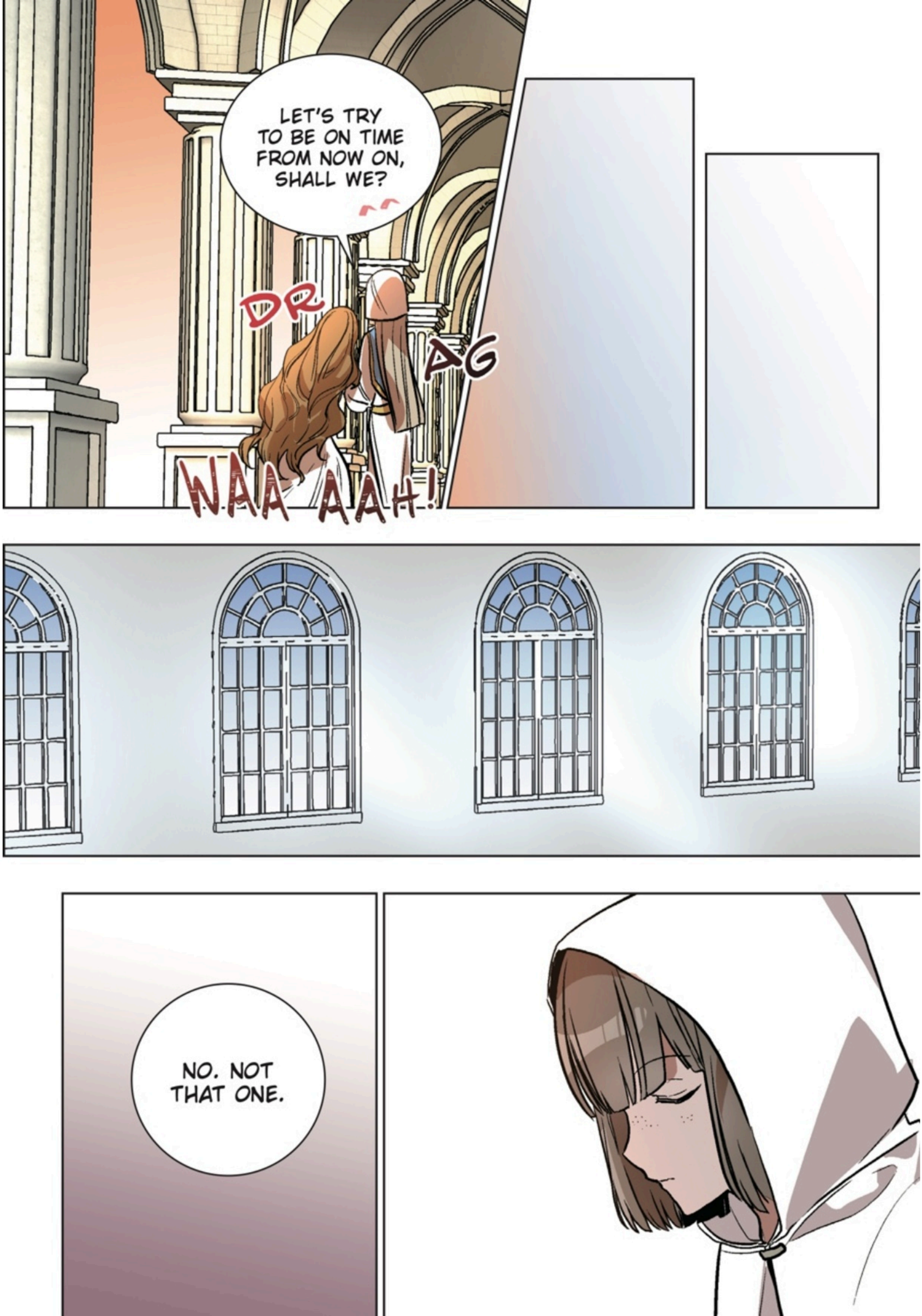
.....
.....HAH!

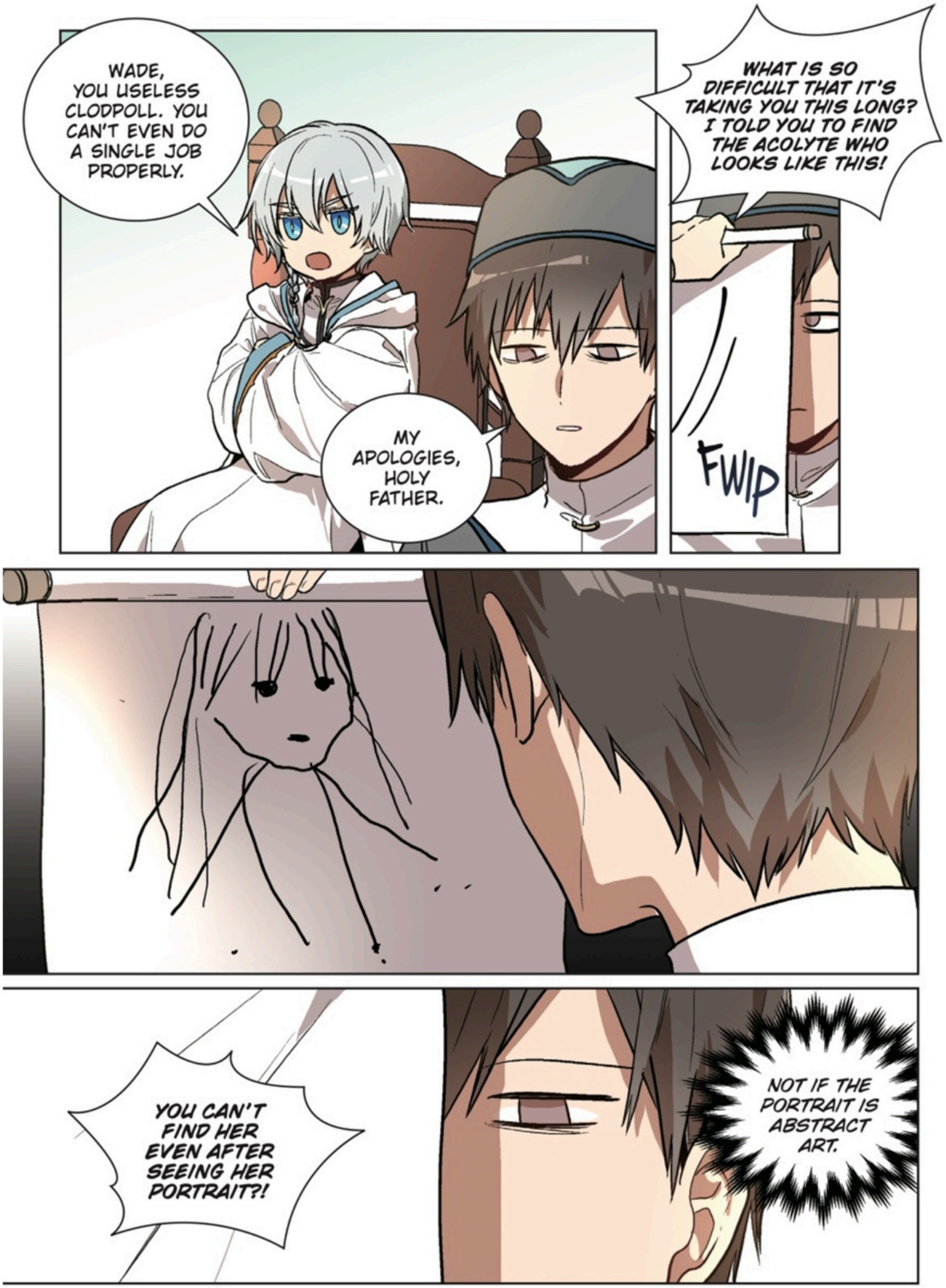



THOUGH I DON'T SUPPOSE THERE'S ANYWHERE I CAN FLY OFF TO MYSELF, IS THERE?

STILL, I'M NOT GONNA QUIT.
MAYBE I CAN AT LEAST FLEE THE DINNER TRAUMA.


AH, THERE YOU ARE, LADY McMILLAN.
IT'S PURIFICATION TIME.


LET'S TRY TO BE ON TIME FROM NOW ON, SHALL WE?
DRAG
WAAAAAH!
NO. NOT THAT ONE.

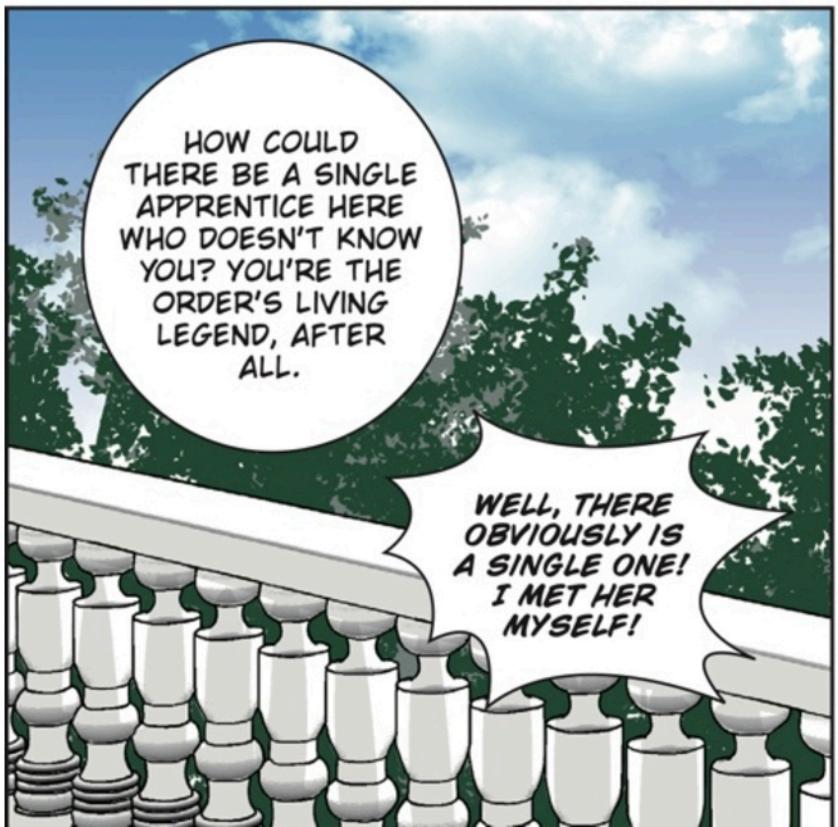

WADE, YOU USELESS CLODPOLL. YOU CAN'T EVEN DO A SINGLE JOB PROPERLY.
MY APOLOGIES, HOLY FATHER.
WHAT IS SO DIFFICULT THAT IT'S TAKING YOU THIS LONG? I TOLD YOU TO FIND THE ACOLYTE WHO LOOKS LIKE THIS!
FWIP
YOU CAN'T FIND HER EVEN AFTER SEEING HER PORTRAIT?!
NOT IF THE PORTRAIT IS ABSTRACT ART.

FATHER, THAT WAS THE LAST REMAINING APPRENTICE YOU JUST SENT AWAY. PERHAPS YOU'RE MISREMEMBERING SOMETHING...
EXCUSE ME?
NEVER MIND.

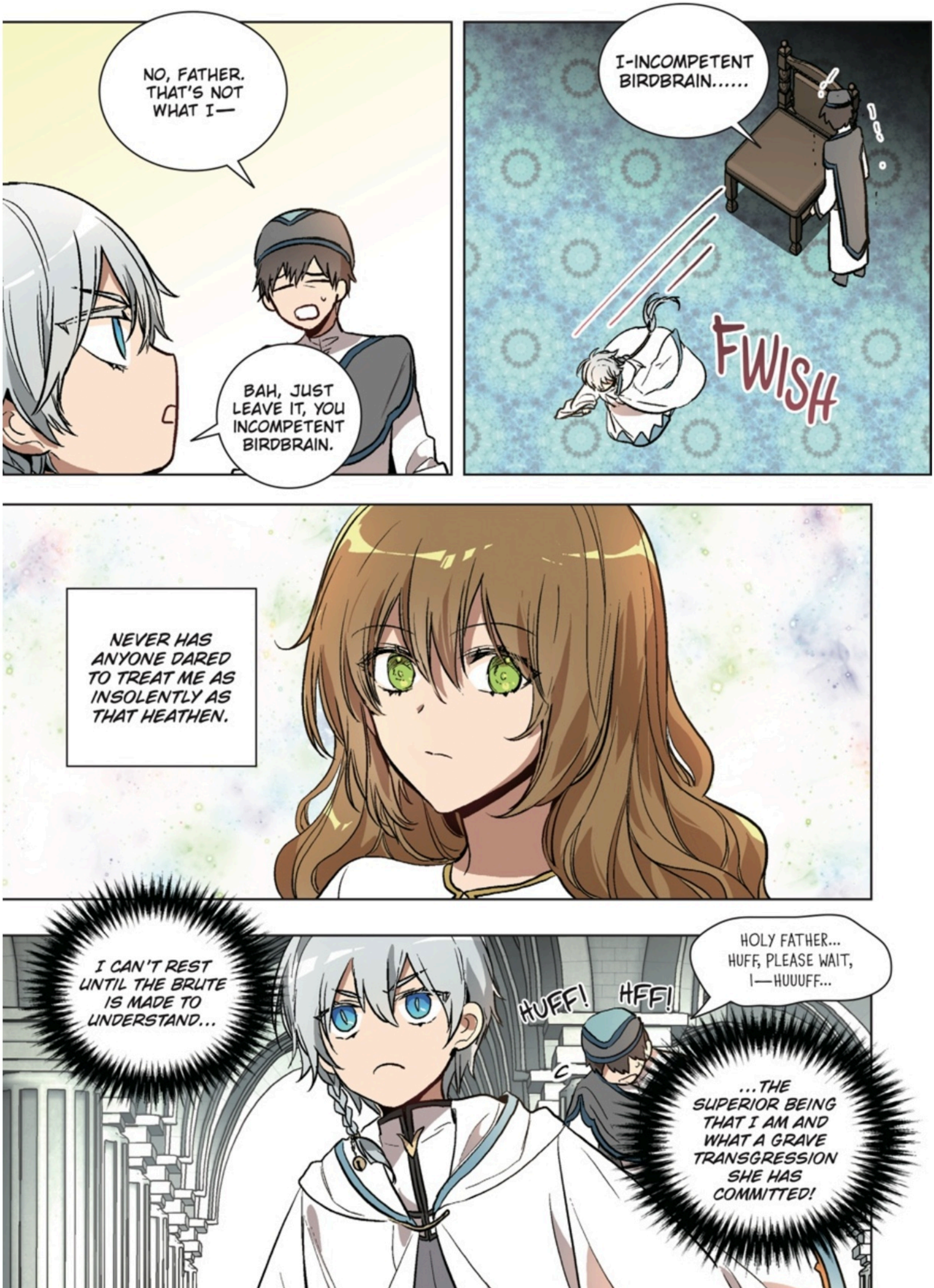
BUT WHY ARE YOU SO INTENT ON FINDING THIS PARTICULAR GIRL?

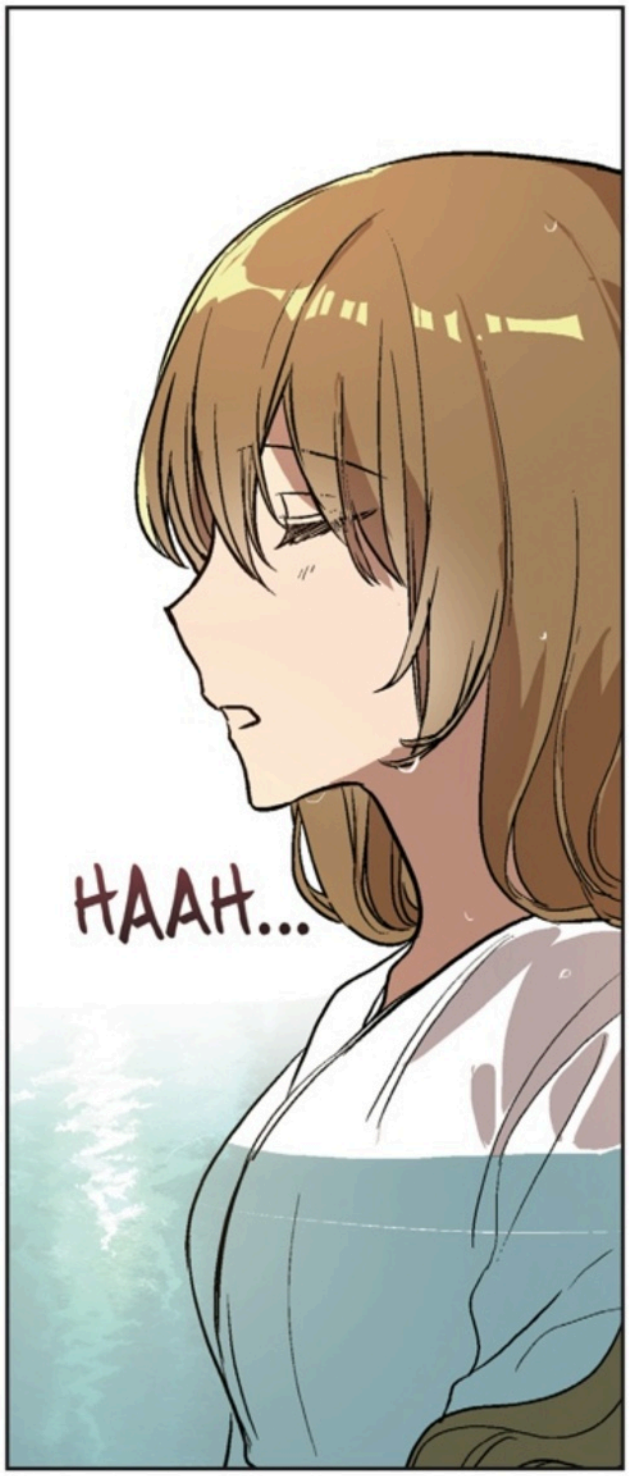
SHE MUST BE INSTRUCTED AS TO WHO I AM.

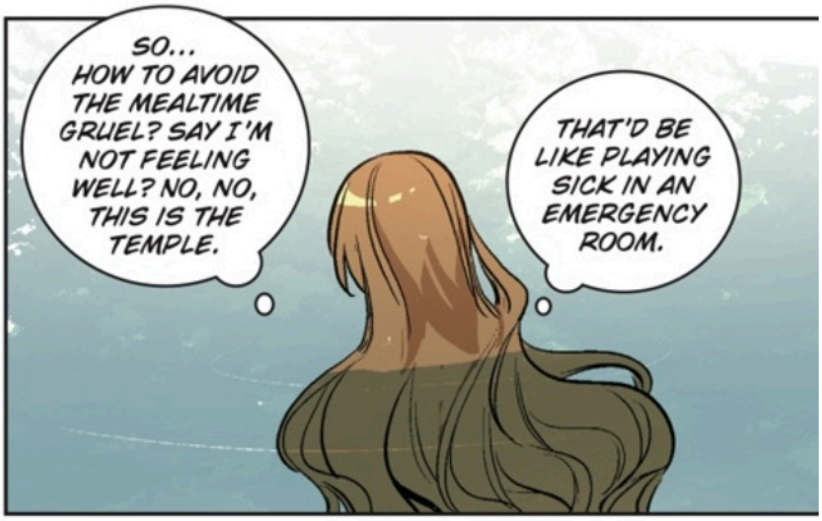
IS HE... GOING SENILE? I MEAN, HE IS AT THAT AGE.....


HOW COULD THERE BE A SINGLE APPRENTICE HERE WHO DOESN'T KNOW YOU? YOU'RE THE ORDER'S LIVING LEGEND, AFTER ALL.
WELL, THERE OBVIOUSLY IS A SINGLE ONE! I MET HER MYSELF!

THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE. I'VE THOROUGHLY EDUCATED ALL OF THEM.
YOU MEAN YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME?

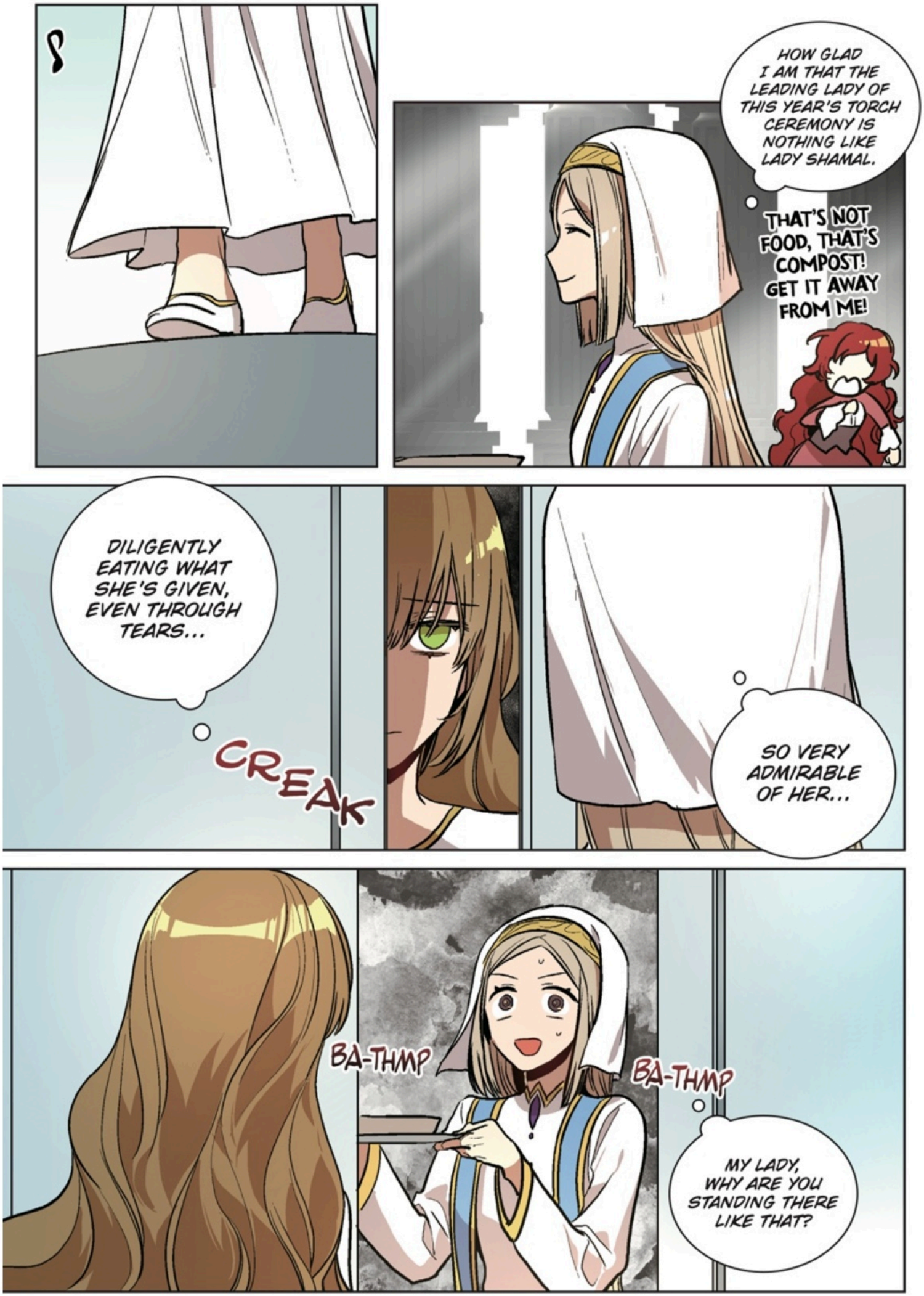

NO, FATHER. THAT'S NOT WHAT I—
BAH, JUST LEAVE IT, YOU INCOMPETENT BIRDBRAIN.
I-INCOMPETENT BIRDBRAIN.....
FWISH
NEVER HAS ANYONE DARED TO TREAT ME AS INSOLENTLY AS THAT HEATHEN.
I CAN'T REST UNTIL THE BRUTE IS MADE TO UNDERSTAND...
HUFF!
HFF!
HOLY FATHER... HUFF, PLEASE WAIT, I—HUUUFF...
...THE SUPERIOR BEING THAT I AM AND WHAT A GRAVE TRANSGRESSION SHE HAS COMMITTED!

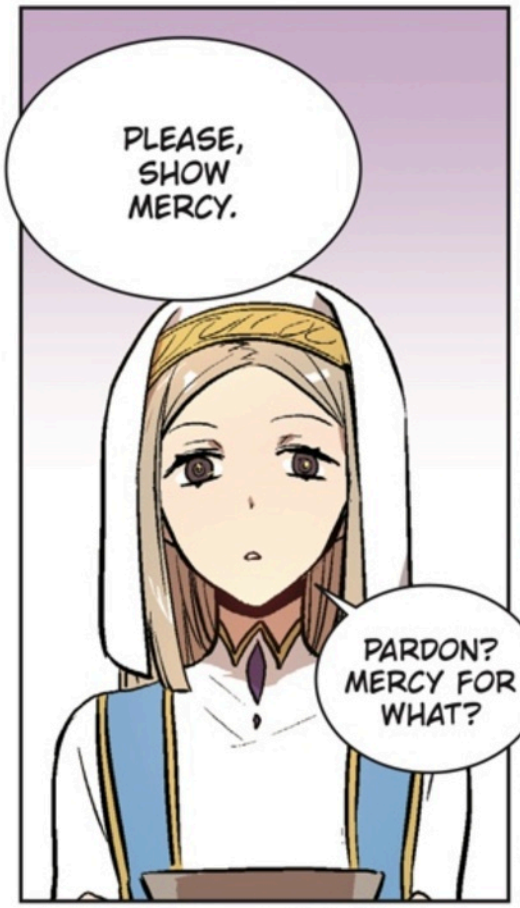

HAAH...


SO... HOW TO AVOID THE MEALTIME GRUEL? SAY I'M NOT FEELING WELL? NO, NO, THIS IS THE TEMPLE.
THAT'D BE LIKE PLAYING SICK IN AN EMERGENCY ROOM.

...NOAH, YOU DUMMY.

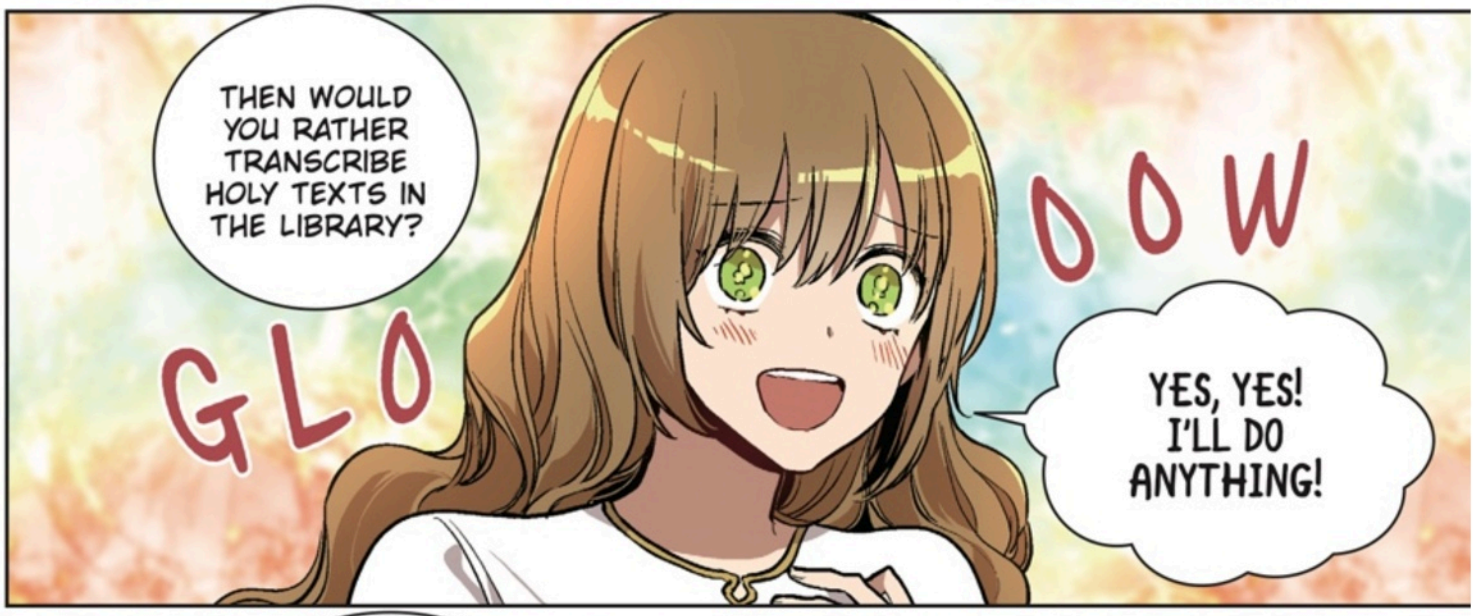
IS SHE ALWAYS LIKE THIS?
Dummy.
So much suffering...
...LET'S HEAD TO THE HILAYA MOUNTAINS NEXT TIME.
IF THE LEGENDS ARE TO BE BELIEVED, DRAGONS DWELL THERE.
NOD

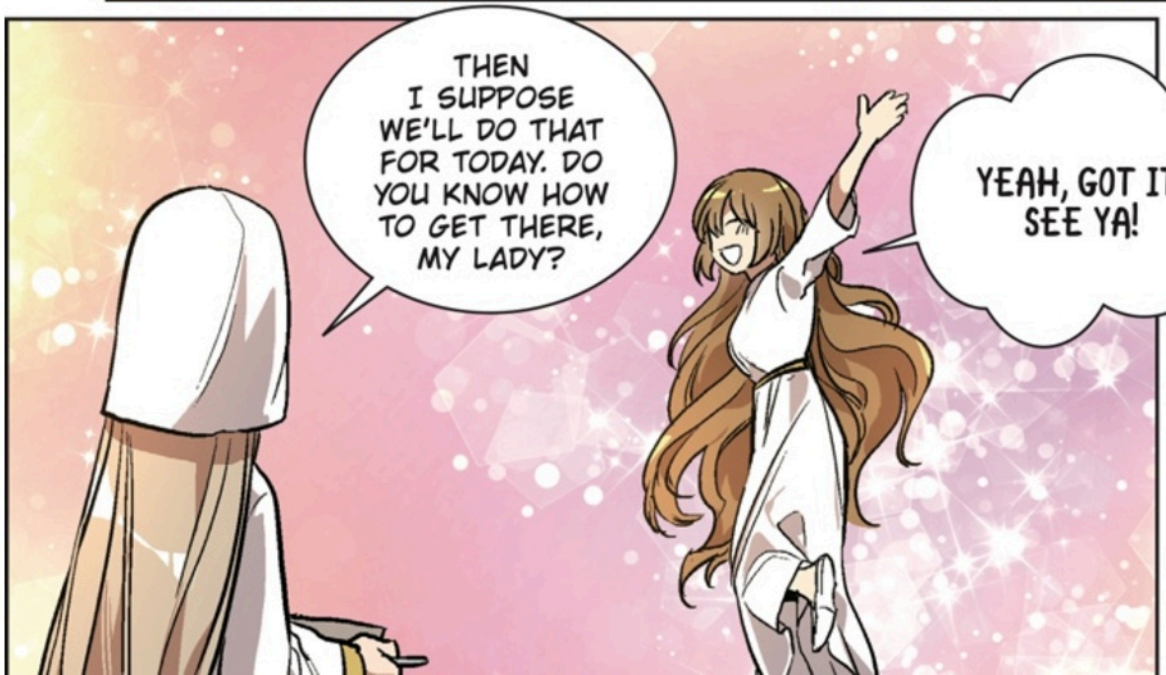

HOW GLAD I AM THAT THE LEADING LADY OF THIS YEAR'S TORCH CEREMONY IS NOTHING LIKE LADY SHAMAL.
THAT'S NOT FOOD, THAT'S COMPOST! GET IT AWAY FROM ME!
DILIGENTLY EATING WHAT SHE'S GIVEN, EVEN THROUGH TEARS...
CREAK
SO VERY ADMIRABLE OF HER...
BA-THMP
BA-THMP
MY LADY, WHY ARE YOU STANDING THERE LIKE THAT?


PLEASE, SHOW MERCY.
PARDON? MERCY FOR WHAT?

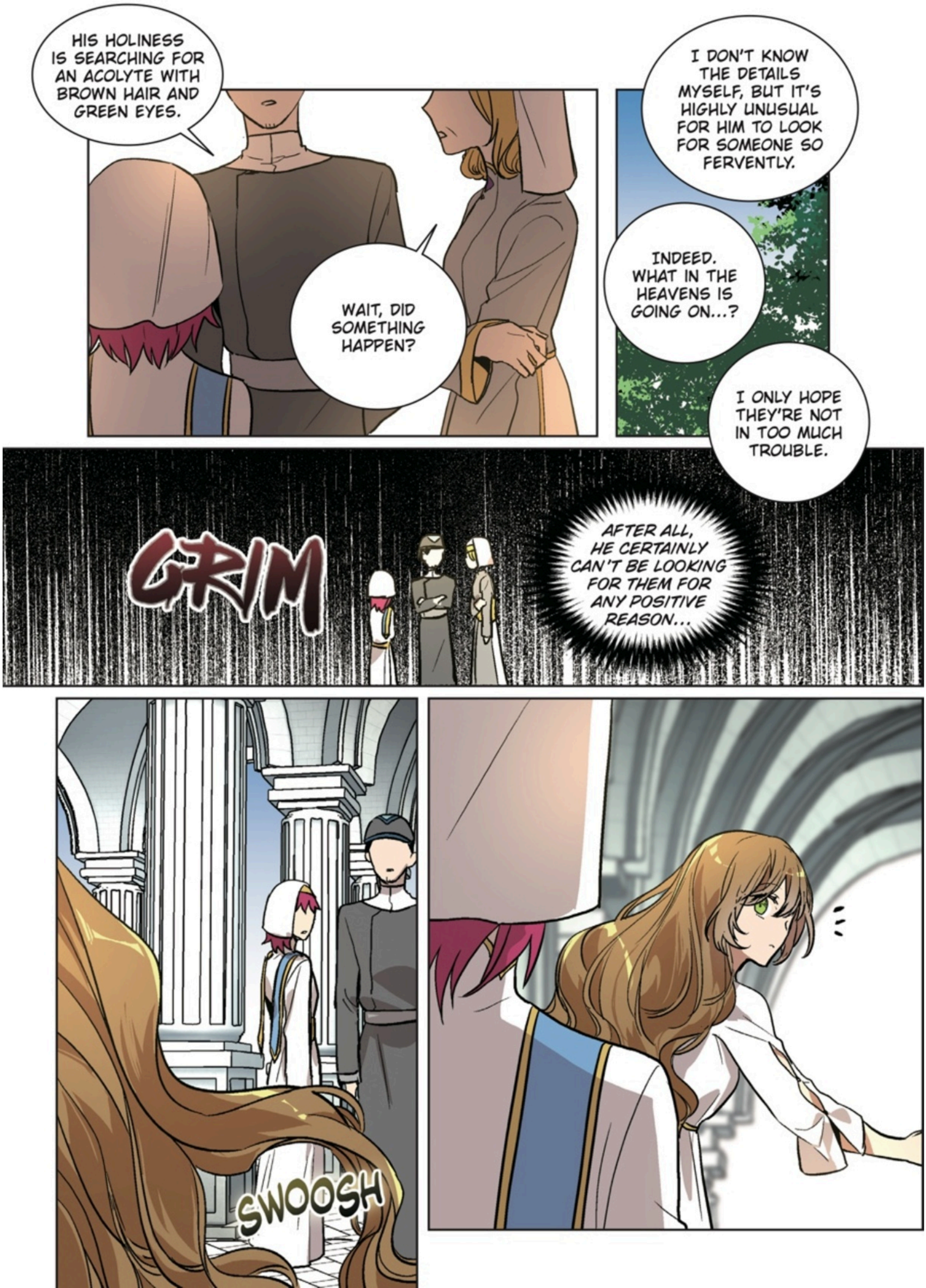
...FOR THAT.

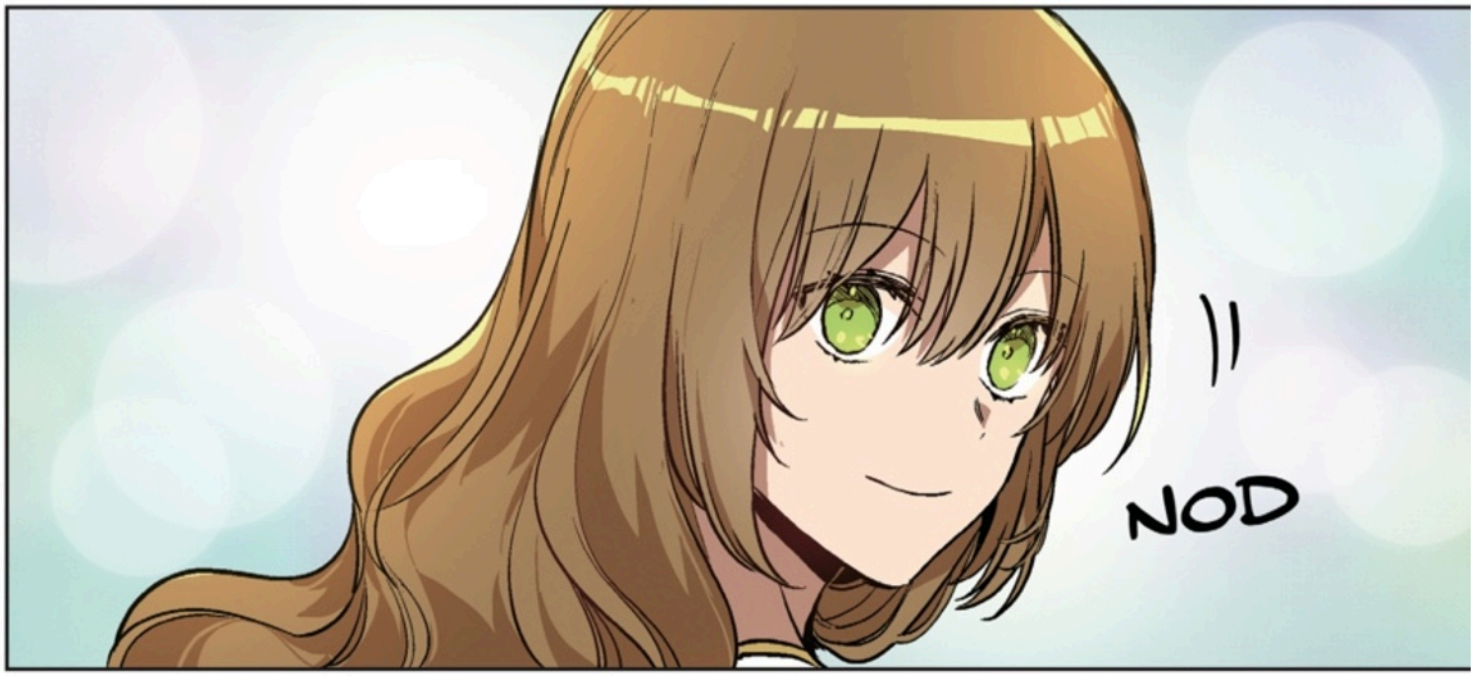
SISTER EUGENIA, I CAN'T DO THIS AGAIN TODAY.
HMM.

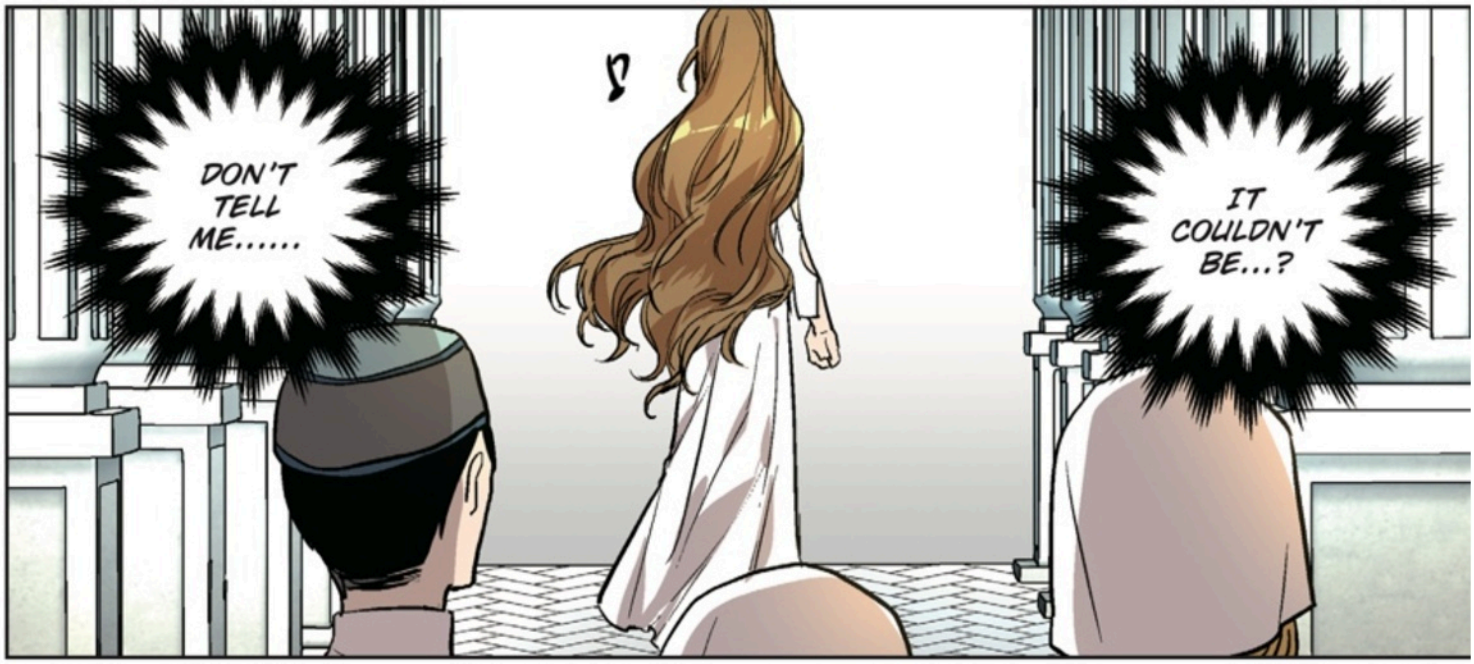

THEN WOULD YOU RATHER TRANSCRIBE HOLY TEXTS IN THE LIBRARY?
GLO
OOW
YES, YES! I'LL DO ANYTHING!

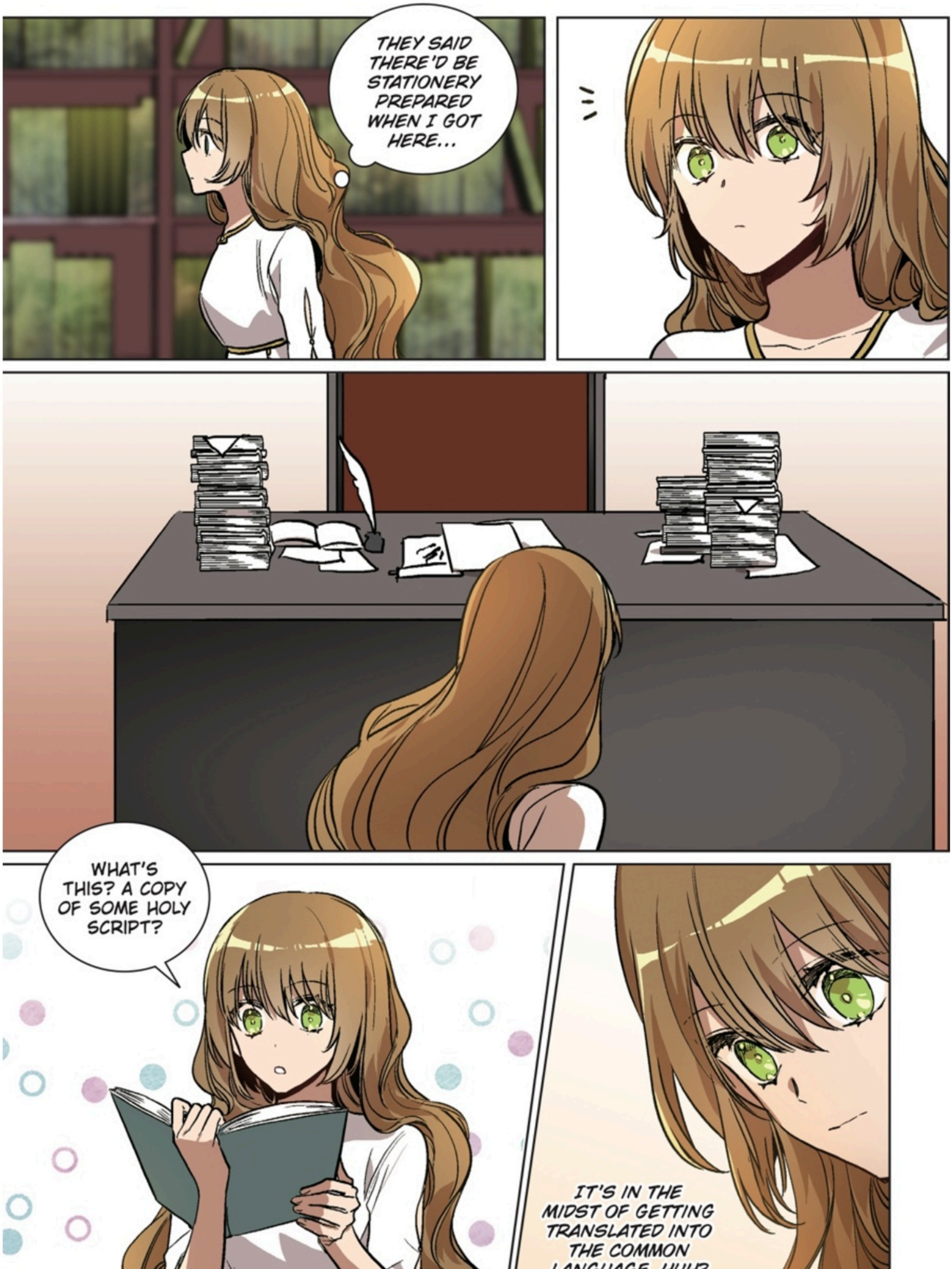

THEN I SUPPOSE WE'LL DO THAT FOR TODAY. DO YOU KNOW HOW TO GET THERE, MY LADY?
YEAH, GOT IT, SEE YA!

SMALL MOURN


HIS HOLINESS IS SEARCHING FOR AN ACOLYTE WITH BROWN HAIR AND GREEN EYES.
WAIT, DID SOMETHING HAPPEN?
I DON'T KNOW THE DETAILS MYSELF, BUT IT'S HIGHLY UNUSUAL FOR HIM TO LOOK FOR SOMEONE SO FERVENTLY.
INDEED. WHAT IN THE HEAVENS IS GOING ON...?
I ONLY HOPE THEY'RE NOT IN TOO MUCH TROUBLE.
GRIM
AFTER ALL, HE CERTAINLY CAN'T BE LOOKING FOR THEM FOR ANY POSITIVE REASON...
SWOOSH

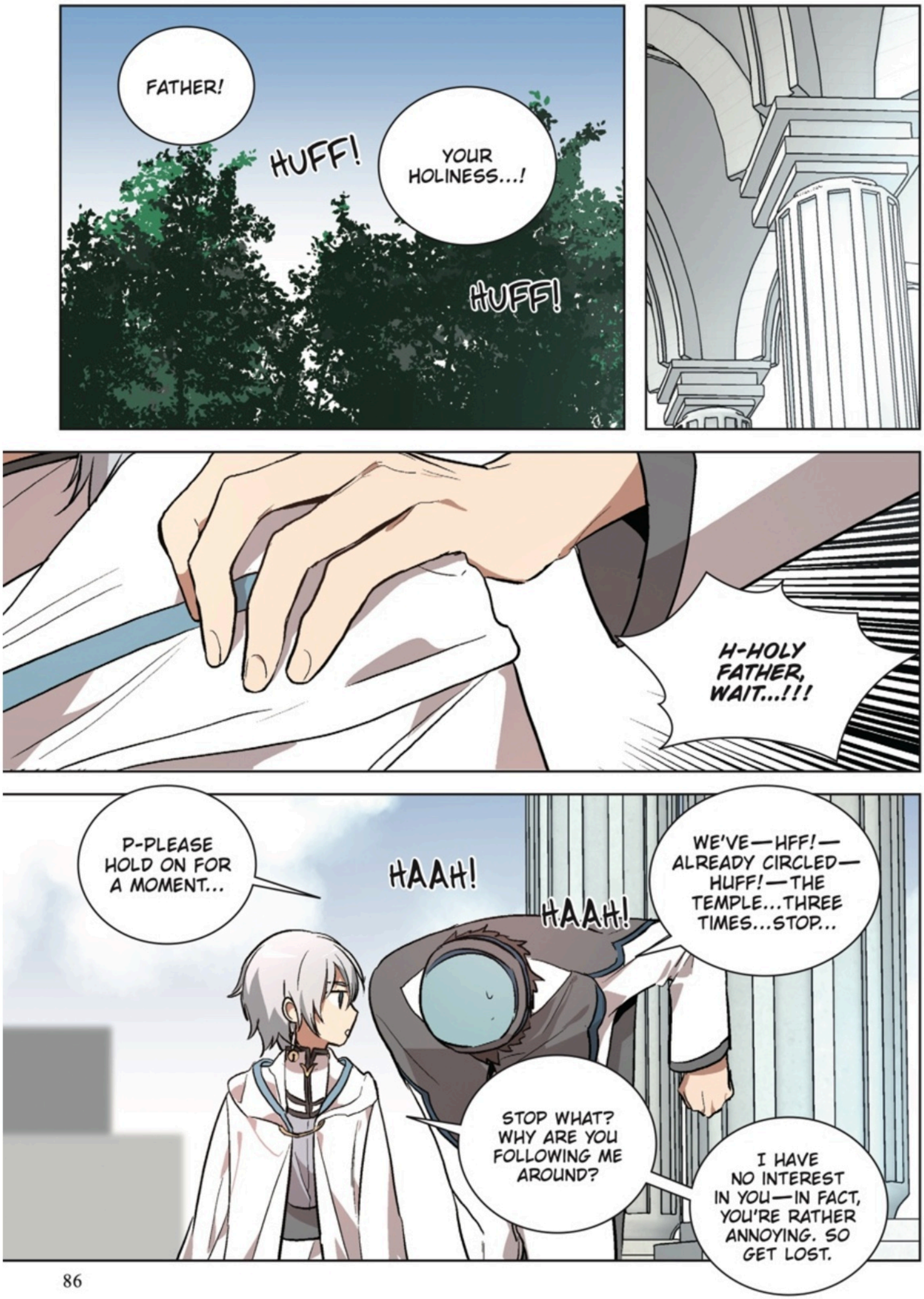

NOD


DON'T TELL ME.....
IT COULDN'T BE...?


THEY SAID THERE'D BE STATIONERY PREPARED WHEN I GOT HERE...
WHAT'S THIS? A COPY OF SOME HOLY SCRIPT?
IT'S IN THE MIDST OF GETTING TRANSLATED INTO THE COMMON LANGUAGE, HUH?

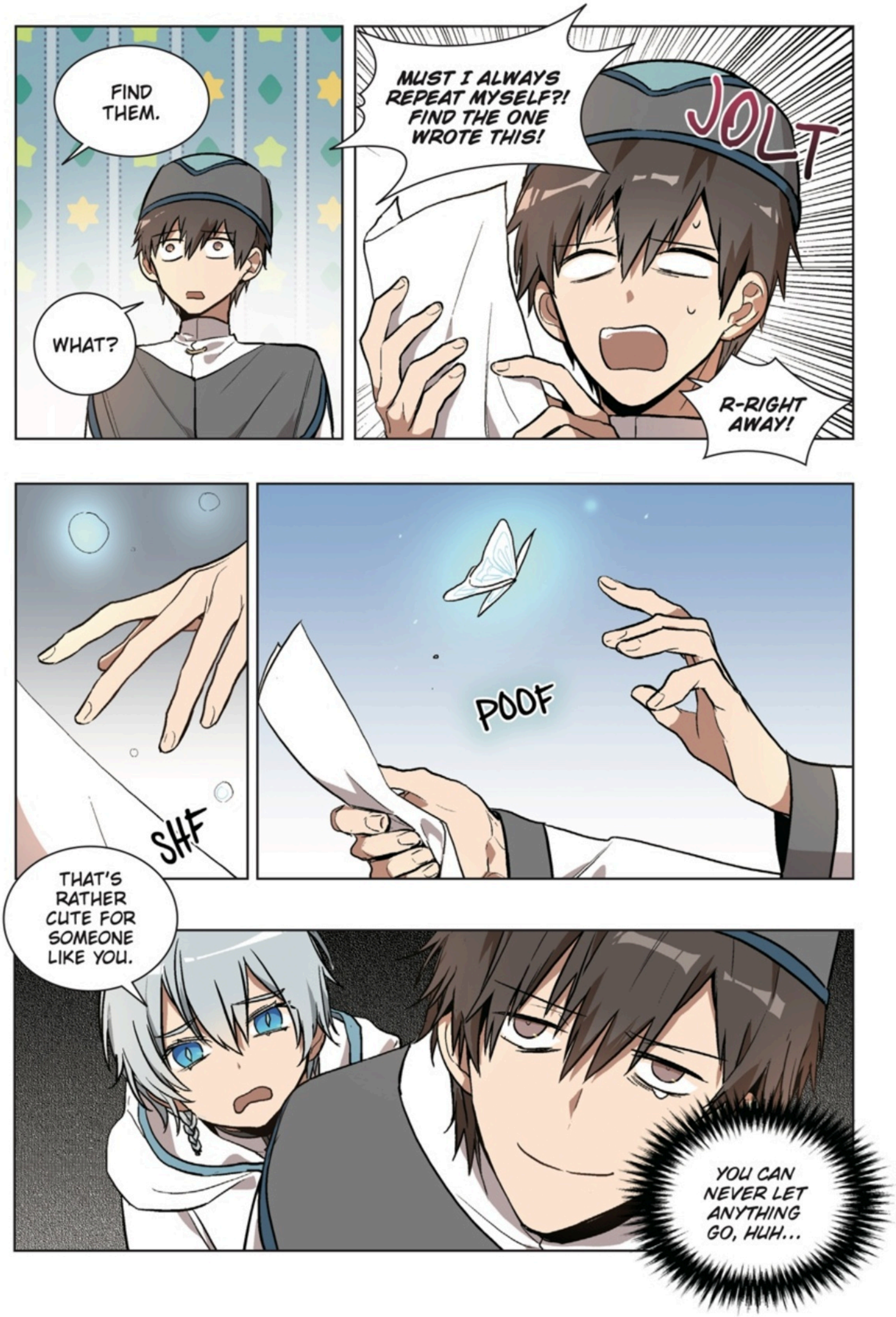
SLIIIDE
SO I'M EXPECTED NOT ONLY TO TRANSCRIBE BUT TO INTERPRET THE TEXT AS WELL? I'M SUPER-GLAD I'VE GOT MY SPECIAL LANGUAGE SKILL, THEN.

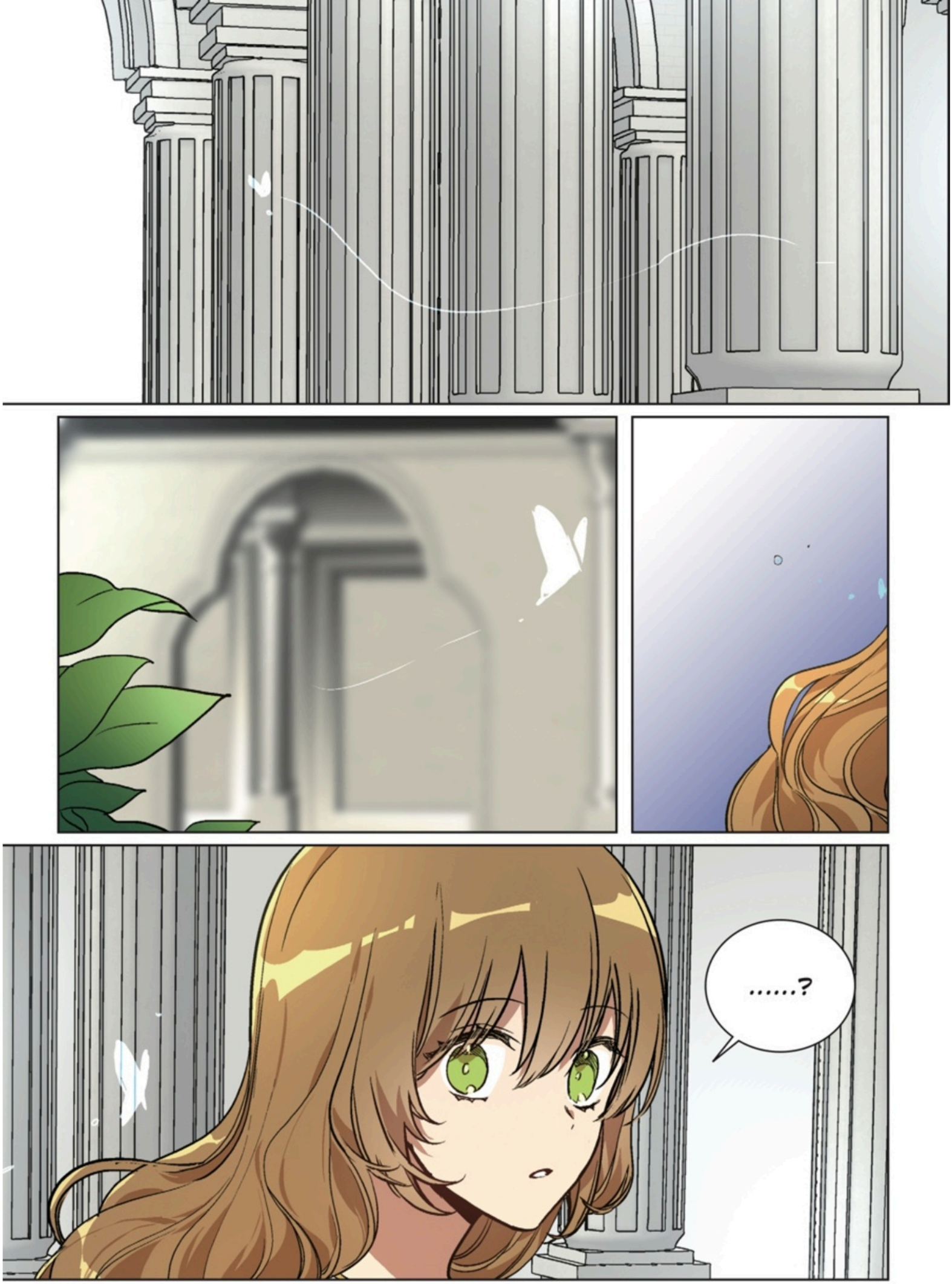
I SHOULD BE FINE JUST CARRYING ON LIKE HOW THIS PERSON WAS DOING IT, I GUESS.


FATHER!
HUFF!
YOUR HOLINESS...!
HUFF!
H-HOLY FATHER, WAIT...!!!
P-PLEASE HOLD ON FOR A MOMENT...
HAAH!
HAAH!
WE'VE—HFF!—ALREADY CIRCLED—HUFF!—THE TEMPLE...THREE TIMES...STOP...
STOP WHAT? WHY ARE YOU FOLLOWING ME AROUND?
I HAVE NO INTEREST IN YOU—IN FACT, YOU'RE RATHER ANNOYING. SO GET LOST.

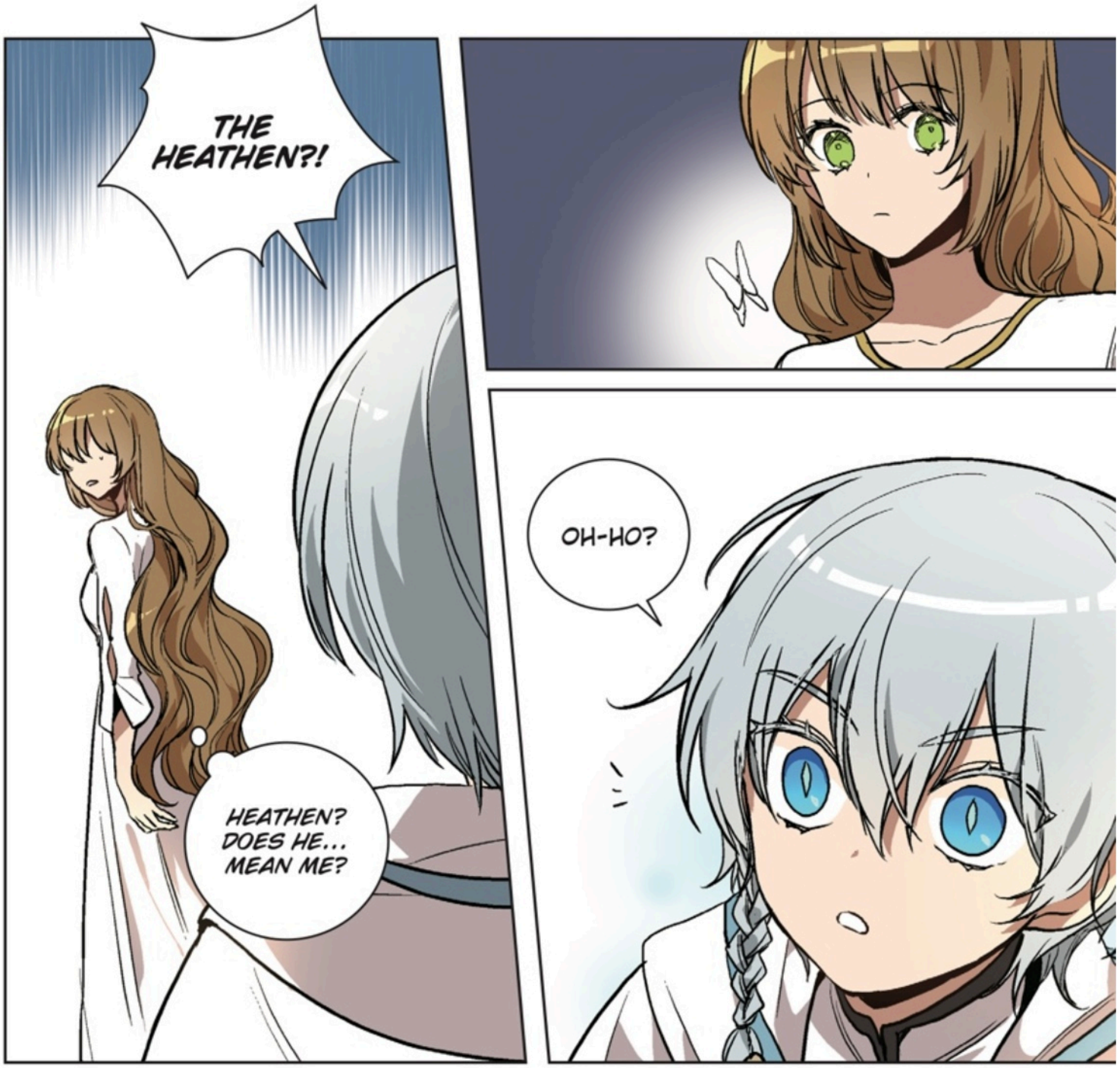
HRMPH.
FWIP
YOUR HOLINESS! WH-WHERE ARE YOU GOING?!
TO THE LIBRARY.
FATHER—!!
EEEEEP!

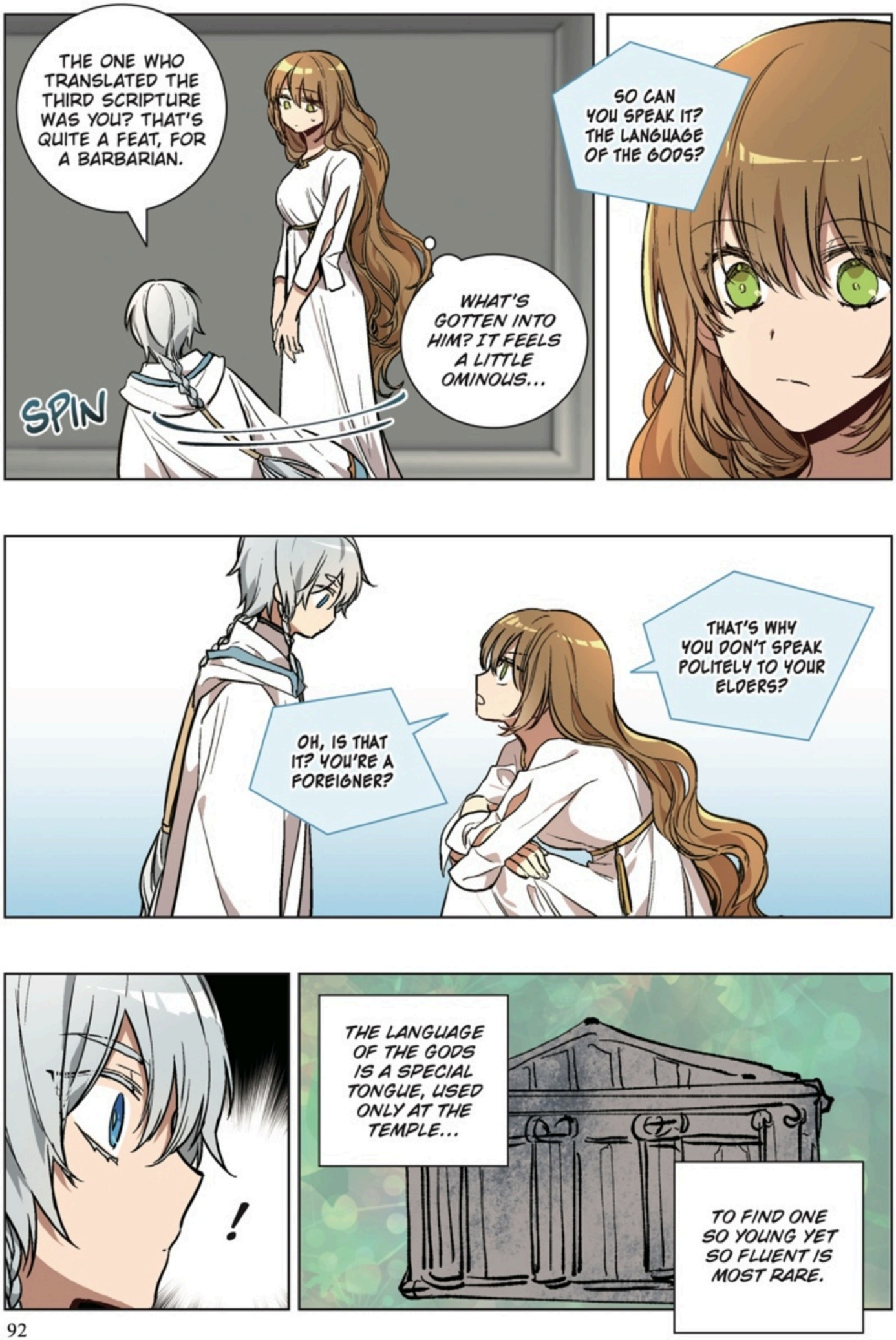
THAT'S THE THIRD SCRIPTURE HIS HOLINESS WAS TRANSLATING... WHO WOULD DARE LAY HANDS ON IT?!
THERE'S NOT EVEN ANYONE BESIDES THE HOLY FATHER WHO CAN READ IT, BUT...
...I WAS SO PREOCCUPIED WITH WELCOMING THE VISITORS, I FORGOT TO TELL EVERYONE TO KEEP OUT OF THE LIBRARY.
I BEG YOUR FORGIVENESS! THIS IS—
PERFECT.
SORRY?
THEIR ANALYTICAL VOCABULARY IS LACKING—IT'S AT THE LEVEL OF A NEWLY INDUCTED STUDENT OF THEOLOGY.
BUT IT'S SO FLUID...THEY COULD PASS FOR A NATIVE SPEAKER.
THERE'S SUCH TALENT HERE AT THE TEMPLE? WHO...?
IF I COULD JUST GIVE THEM A BIT OF DIRECTION... THE AMOUNT OF PROGRESS WE COULD ACHIEVE!

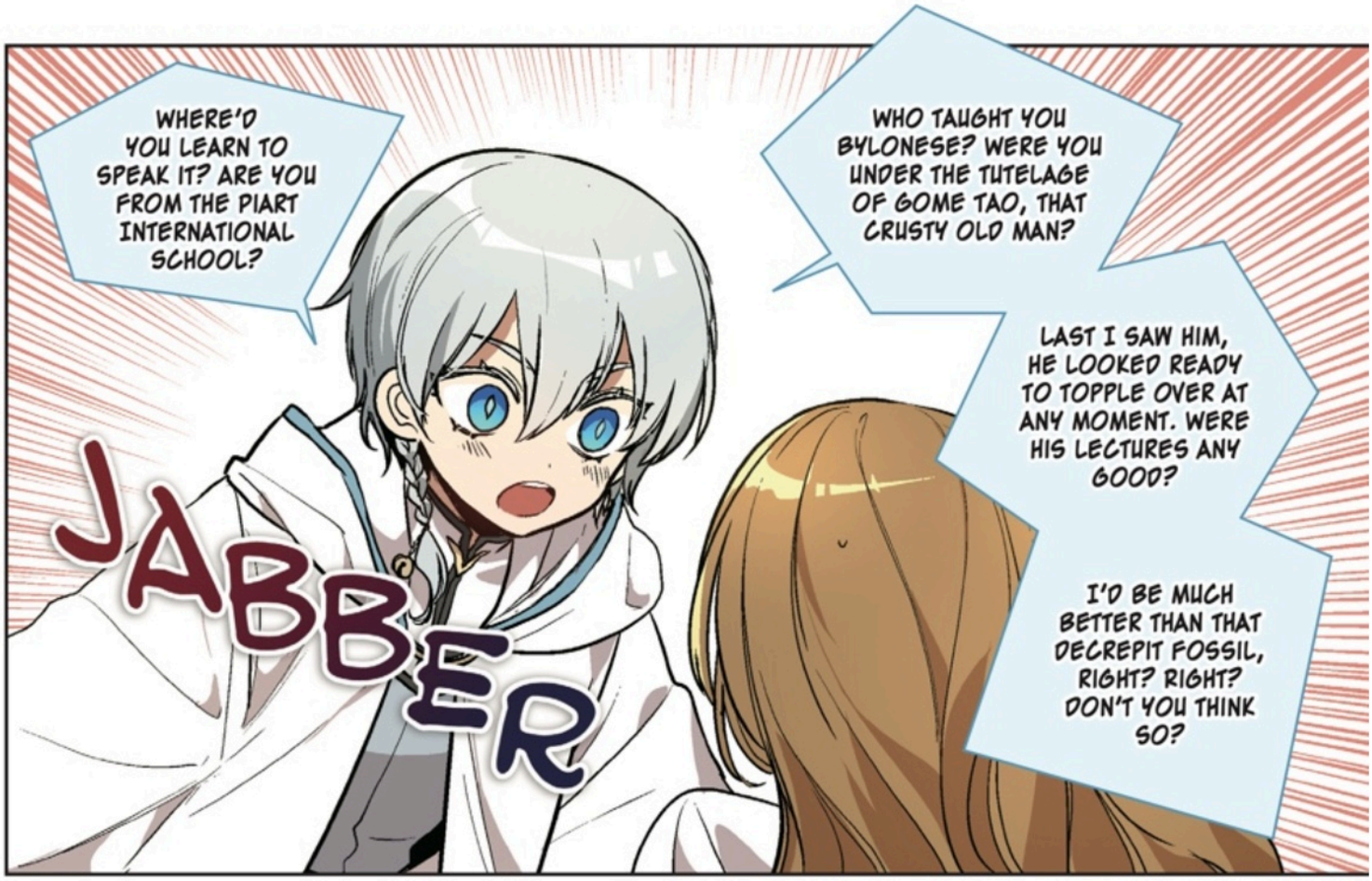

FIND THEM.
WHAT?
MUST I ALWAYS REPEAT MYSELF?! FIND THE ONE WROTE THIS!
JOLT
R-RIGHT AWAY!
SHF
POOF
THAT'S RATHER CUTE FOR SOMEONE LIKE YOU.
YOU CAN NEVER LET ANYTHING GO, HUH...

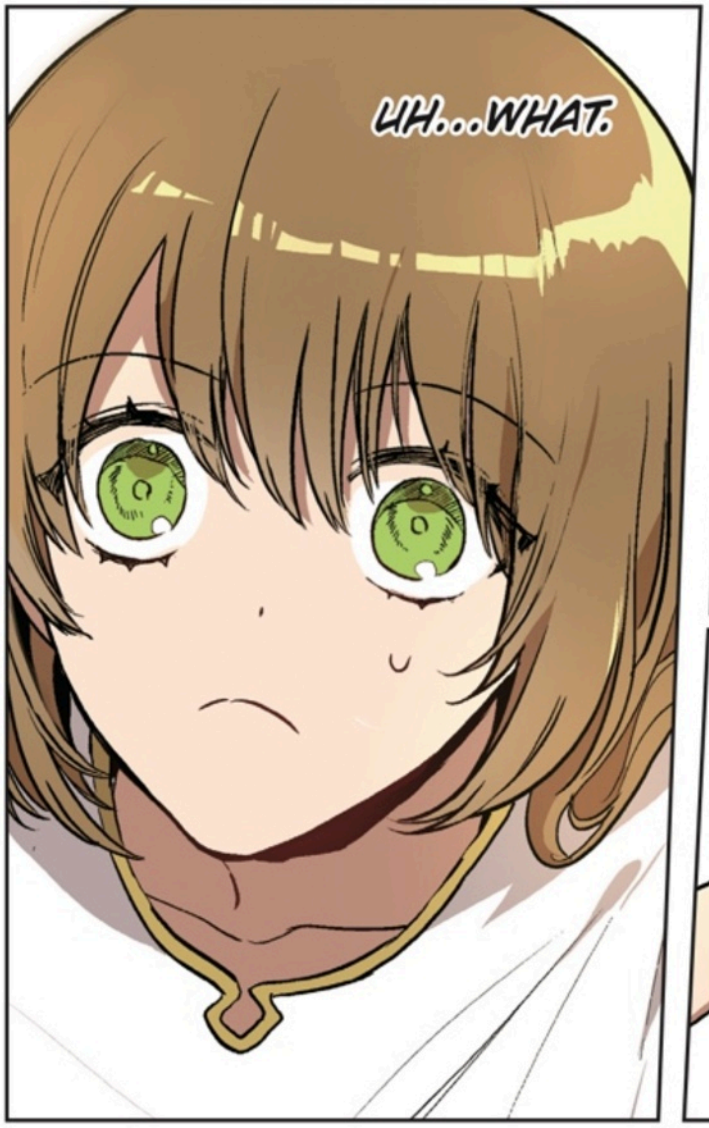


WHAT'S THIS?
YOU!!


THE HEATHEN?!
HEATHEN? DOES HE... MEAN ME?
OH-HO?


THE ONE WHO TRANSLATED THE THIRD SCRIPTURE WAS YOU? THAT'S QUITE A FEAT, FOR A BARBARIAN.
SPIN
WHAT'S GOTTEN INTO HIM? IT FEELS A LITTLE OMINOUS...
SO CAN YOU SPEAK IT? THE LANGUAGE OF THE GODS?
OH, IS THAT IT? YOU'RE A FOREIGNER?
THAT'S WHY YOU DON'T SPEAK POLITELY TO YOUR ELDERS?
!
THE LANGUAGE OF THE GODS IS A SPECIAL TONGUE, USED ONLY AT THE TEMPLE...
TO FIND ONE SO YOUNG YET SO FLUENT IS MOST RARE.

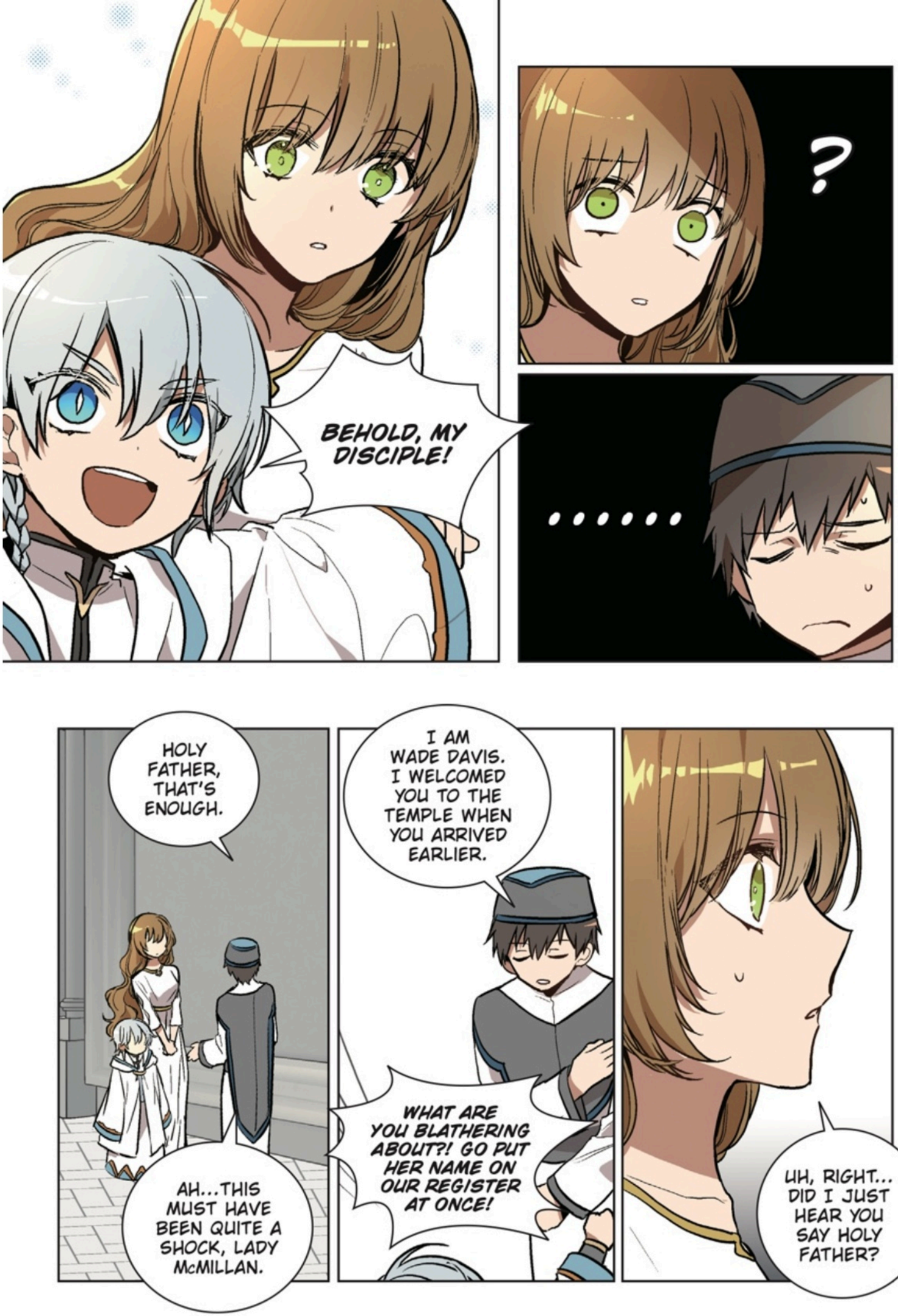

WHERE'D YOU LEARN TO SPEAK IT? ARE YOU FROM THE PIART INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL?
WHO TAUGHT YOU BYLONESE? WERE YOU UNDER THE TUTELAGE OF GOME TAO, THAT CRUSTY OLD MAN?
LAST I SAW HIM, HE LOOKED READY TO TOPPLE OVER AT ANY MOMENT. WERE HIS LECTURES ANY GOOD?
I'D BE MUCH BETTER THAN THAT DECREPIT FOSSIL, RIGHT? RIGHT? DON'T YOU THINK SO?
JABBER

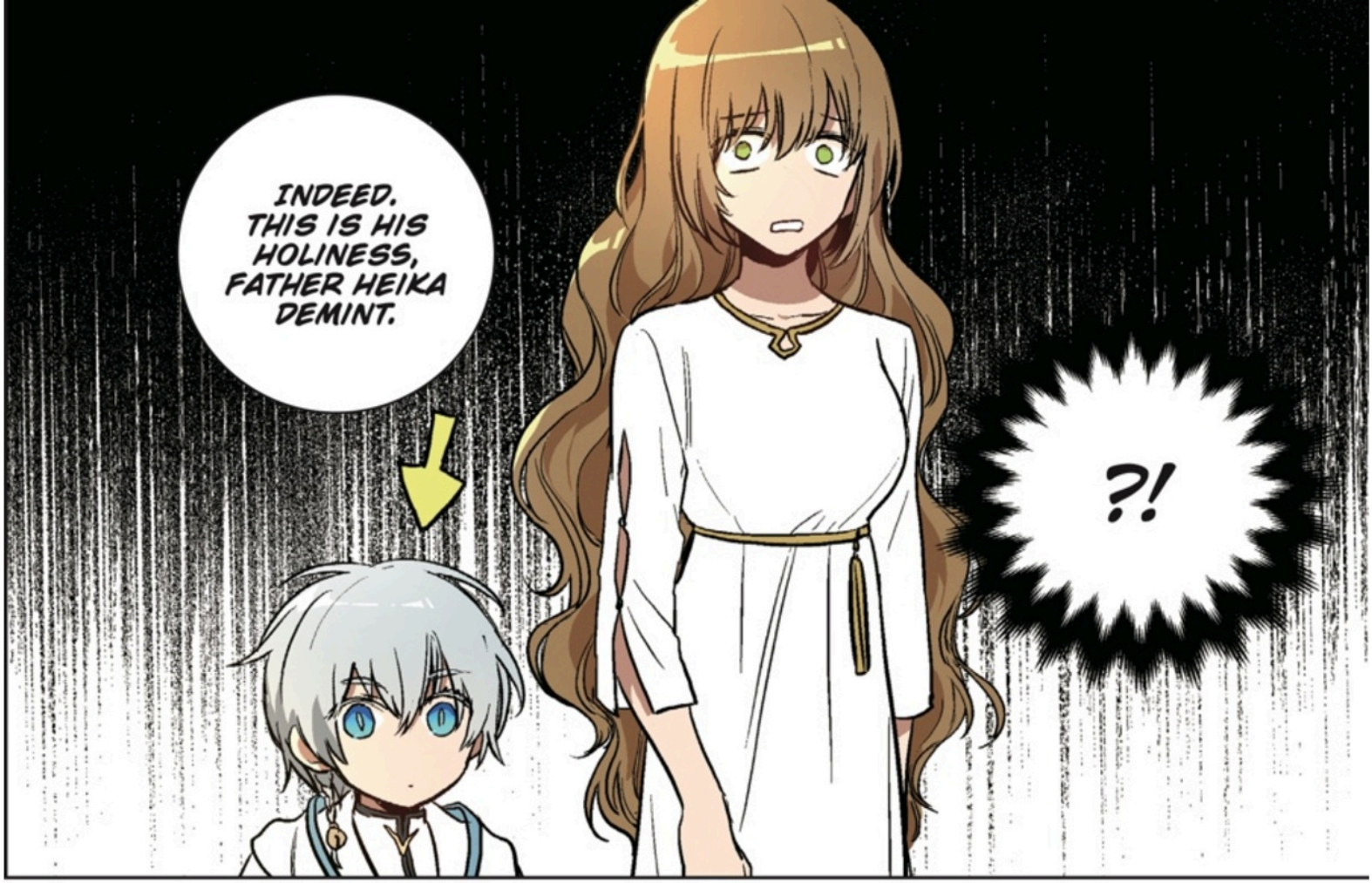

UH...WHAT.

WADE! WADE!!
WHEEZE
WHEEZE

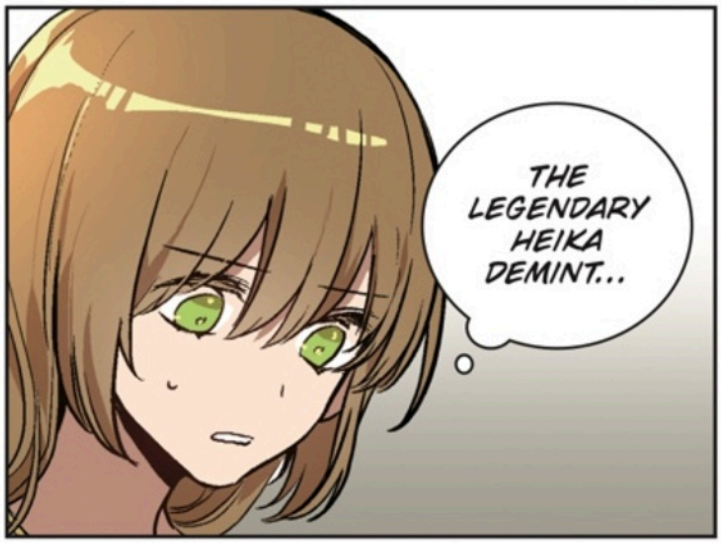
HUFF, PUFF...YES? HUFF...

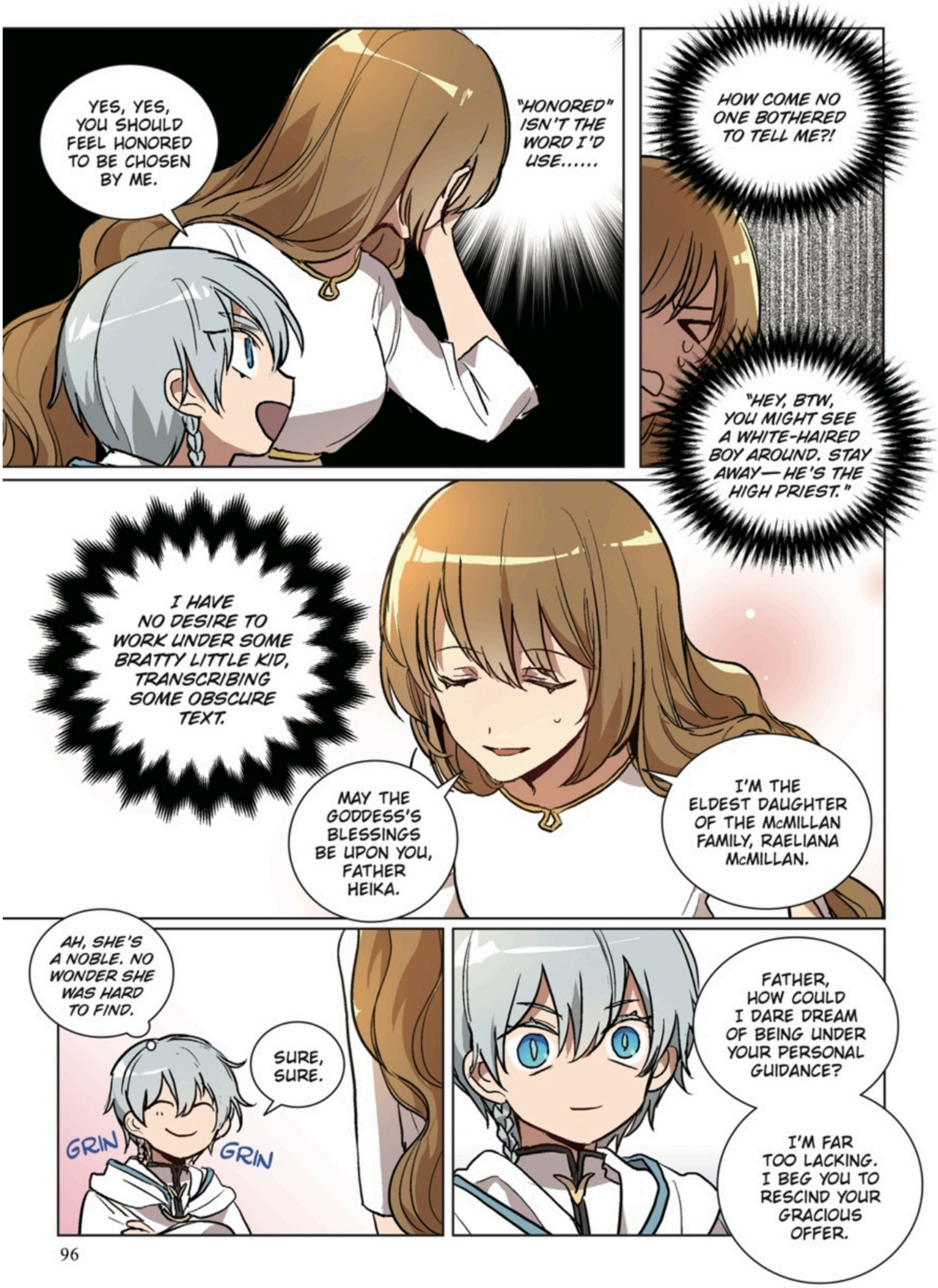
GRAB

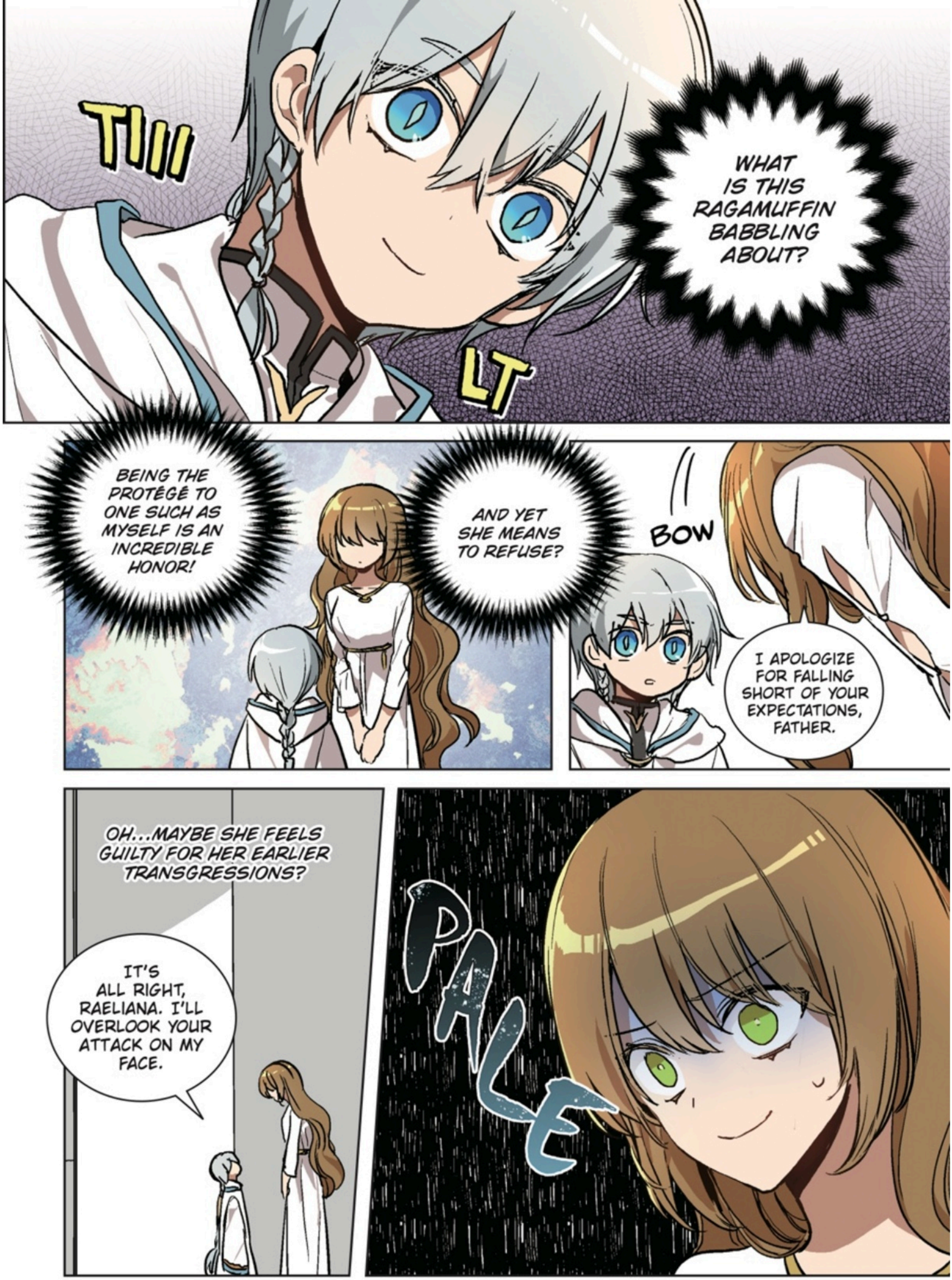

BEHOLD, MY DISCIPLE!
?
.....
HOLY FATHER, THAT'S ENOUGH.
AH...THIS MUST HAVE BEEN QUITE A SHOCK, LADY McMILLAN.
I AM WADE DAVIS. I WELCOMED YOU TO THE TEMPLE WHEN YOU ARRIVED EARLIER.
WHAT ARE YOU BLATHERING ABOUT?! GO PUT HER NAME ON OUR REGISTER AT ONCE!
UH, RIGHT... DID I JUST HEAR YOU SAY HOLY FATHER?

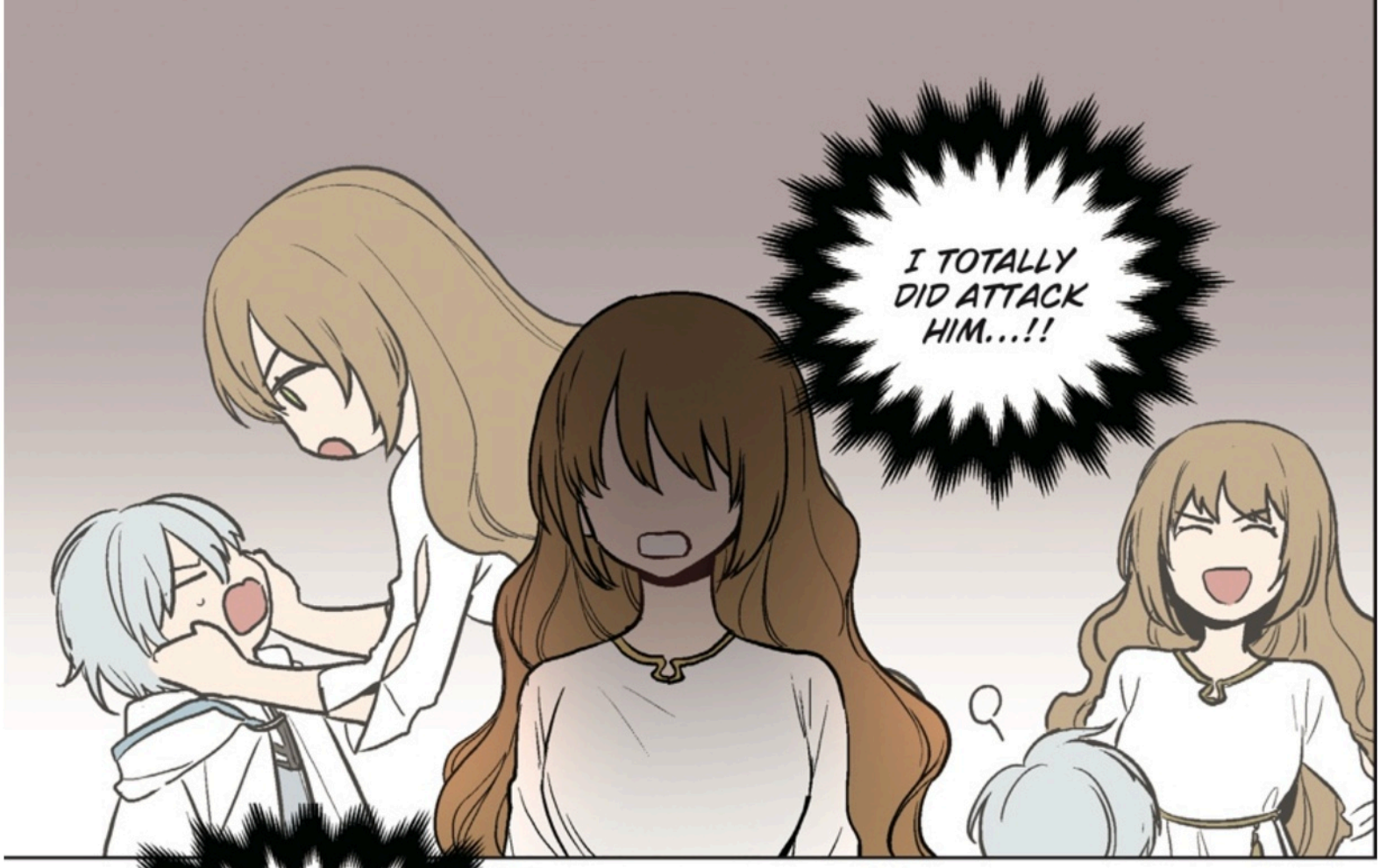

INDEED. THIS IS HIS HOLINESS, FATHER HEIKA DEMINT.
?!

KEEPING HIS DIVINE POWER SEALED CAUSES HIM TO APPEAR... LIKE THIS.


THE LEGENDARY HEIKA DEMINT...

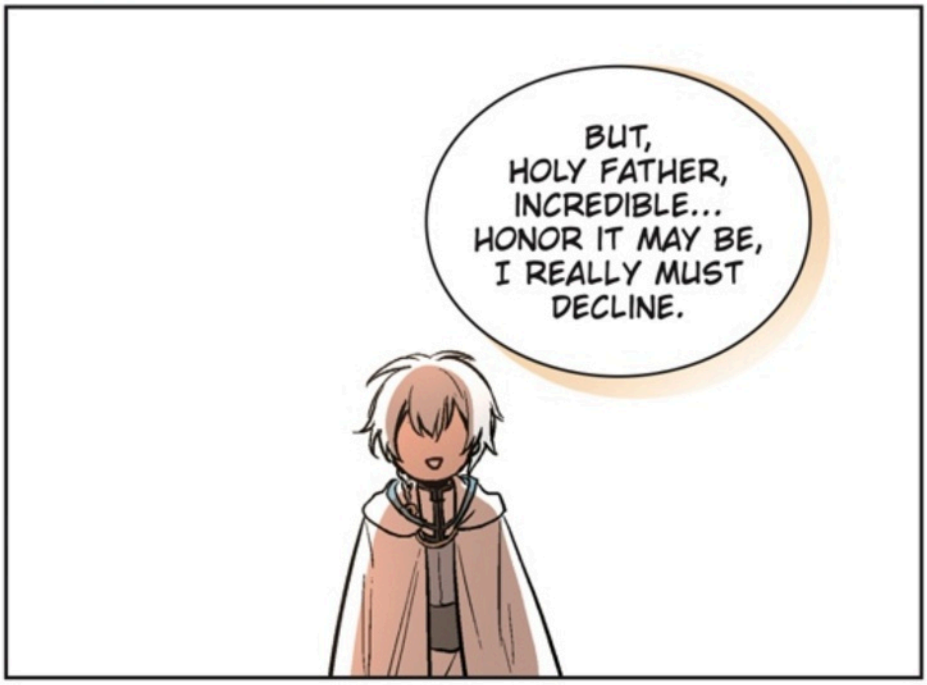

YES, YES, YOU SHOULD FEEL HONORED TO BE CHOSEN BY ME.
"HONORED" ISN'T THE WORD I'D USE.....
HOW COME NO ONE BOTHERED TO TELL ME?!
"HEY, BTW, YOU MIGHT SEE A WHITE-HAIRED BOY AROUND. STAY AWAY— HE'S THE HIGH PRIEST."
I HAVE NO DESIRE TO WORK UNDER SOME BRATTY LITTLE KID, TRANSCRIBING SOME OBSCURE TEXT.
MAY THE GODDESS'S BLESSINGS BE UPON YOU, FATHER HEIKA.
I'M THE ELDEST DAUGHTER OF THE McMILLAN FAMILY, RAELIANA McMILLAN.
AH, SHE'S A NOBLE. NO WONDER SHE WAS HARD TO FIND.
SURE, SURE.
GRIN
GRIN
FATHER, HOW COULD I DARE DREAM OF BEING UNDER YOUR PERSONAL GUIDANCE?
I'M FAR TOO LACKING. I BEG YOU TO RESCIND YOUR GRACIOUS OFFER.

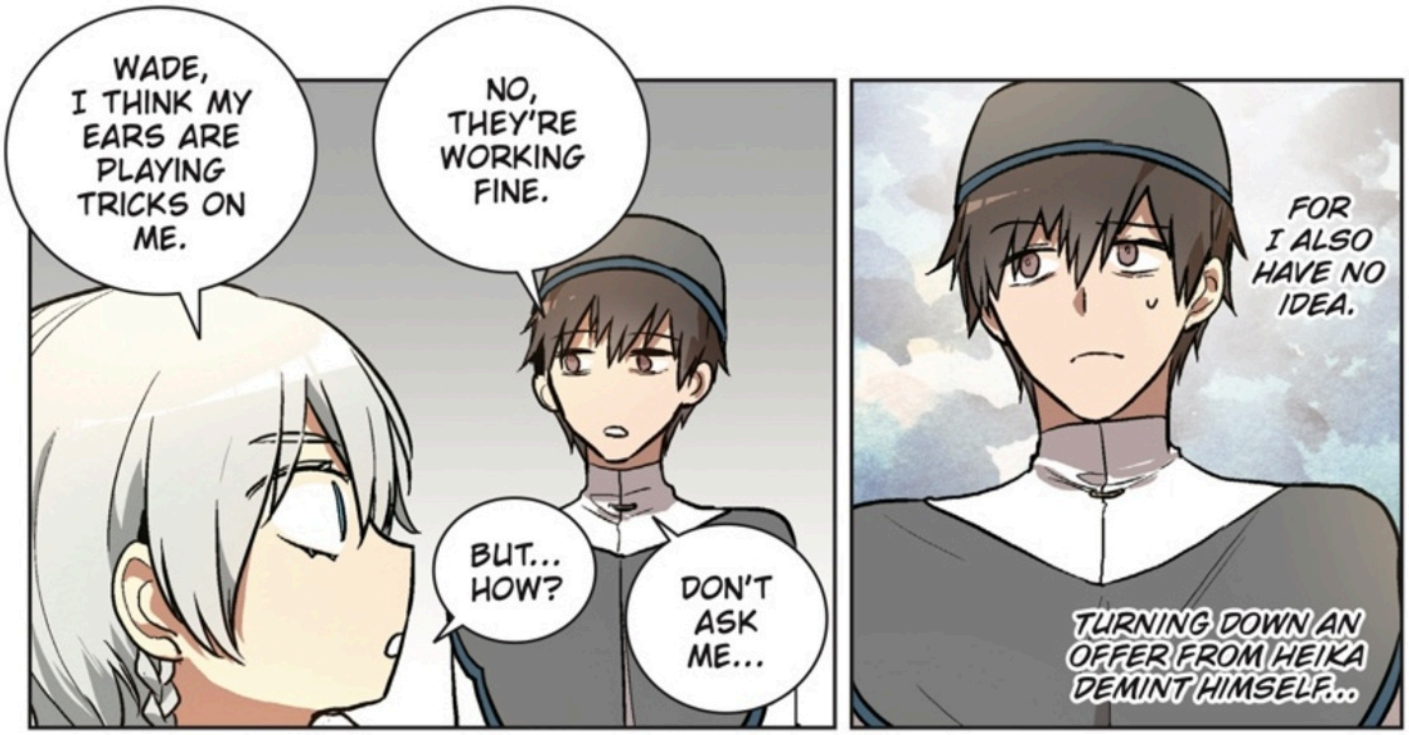

TIII
LT
WHAT IS THIS RAGAMUFFIN BABBLING ABOUT?
BEING THE PROTÉGÉ TO ONE SUCH AS MYSELF IS AN INCREDIBLE HONOR!
AND YET SHE MEANS TO REFUSE?
BOW
I APOLOGIZE FOR FALLING SHORT OF YOUR EXPECTATIONS, FATHER.
OH...MAYBE SHE FEELS GUILTY FOR HER EARLIER TRANSGRESSIONS?
IT'S ALL RIGHT, RAELIANA. I'LL OVERLOOK YOUR ATTACK ON MY FACE.
PALE


I TOTALLY DID ATTACK HIM...!!

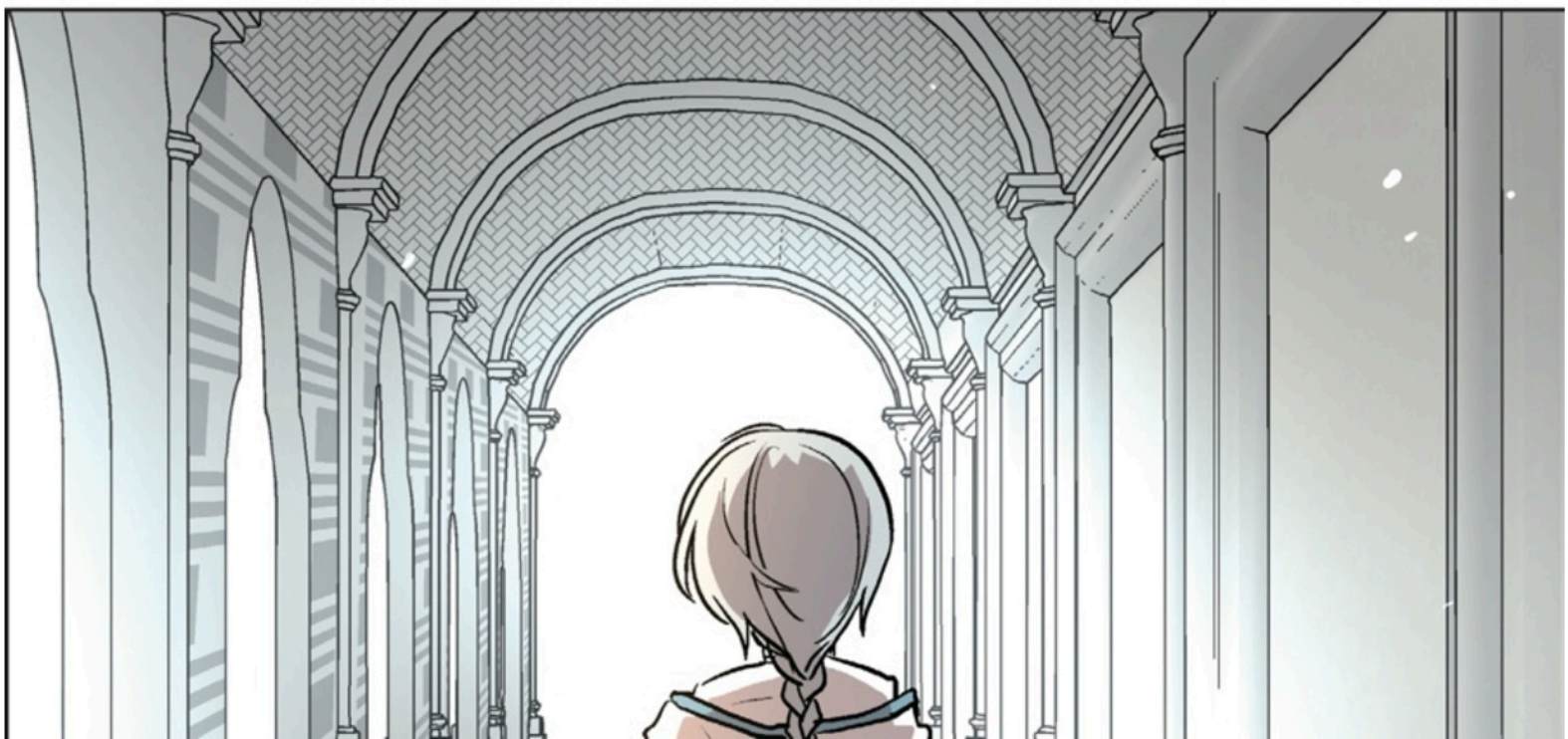
SO THIS IS WHY YOU'VE GOTTA TREAT KIDS THE WAY YOU WANT TO BE TREATED.
I'M TRULY GRATEFUL FOR YOUR CLEMENCY.

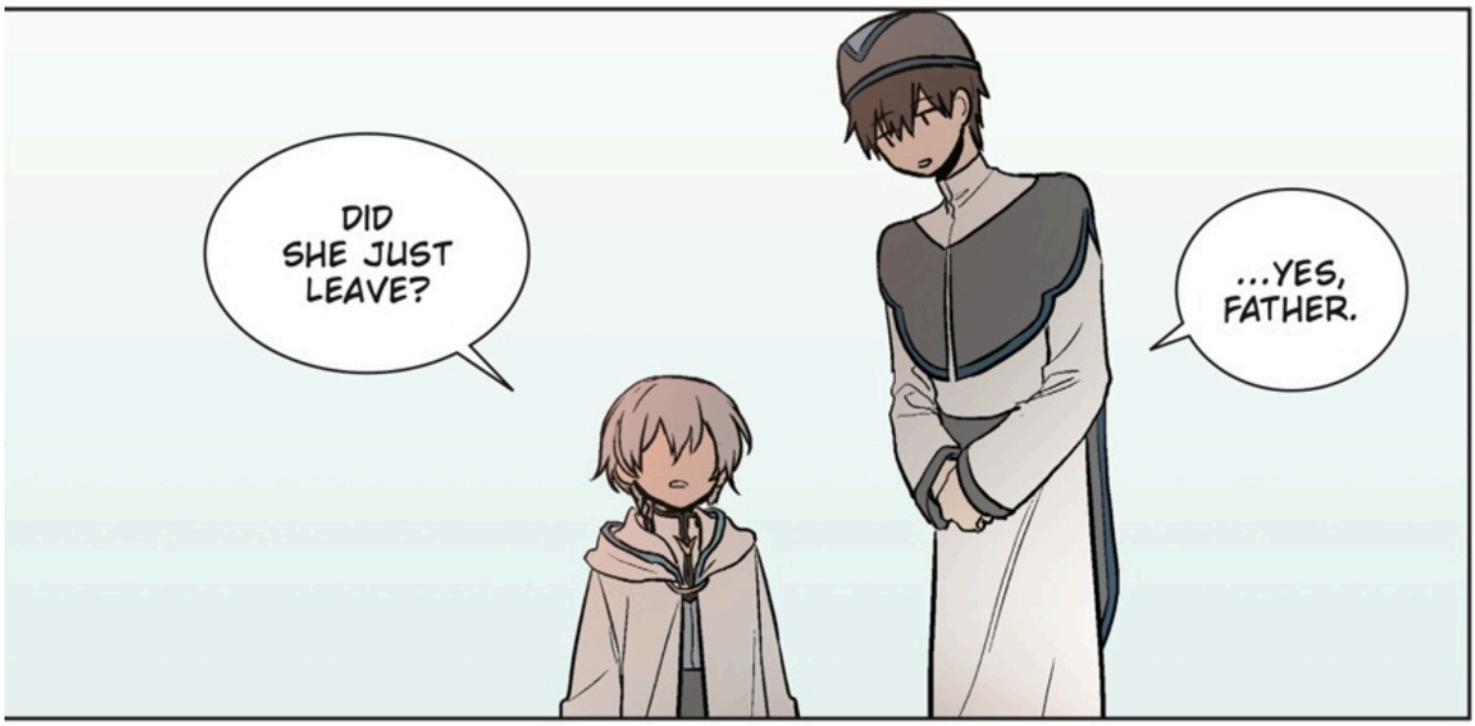
MM-HMM. GLAD IT'S SETTLED.


BUT, HOLY FATHER, INCREDIBLE... HONOR IT MAY BE, I REALLY MUST DECLINE.


WADE, I THINK MY EARS ARE PLAYING TRICKS ON ME.
NO, THEY'RE WORKING FINE.
BUT... HOW?
DON'T ASK ME...
FOR I ALSO HAVE NO IDEA.
TURNING DOWN AN OFFER FROM HEIKA DEMINT HIMSELF...

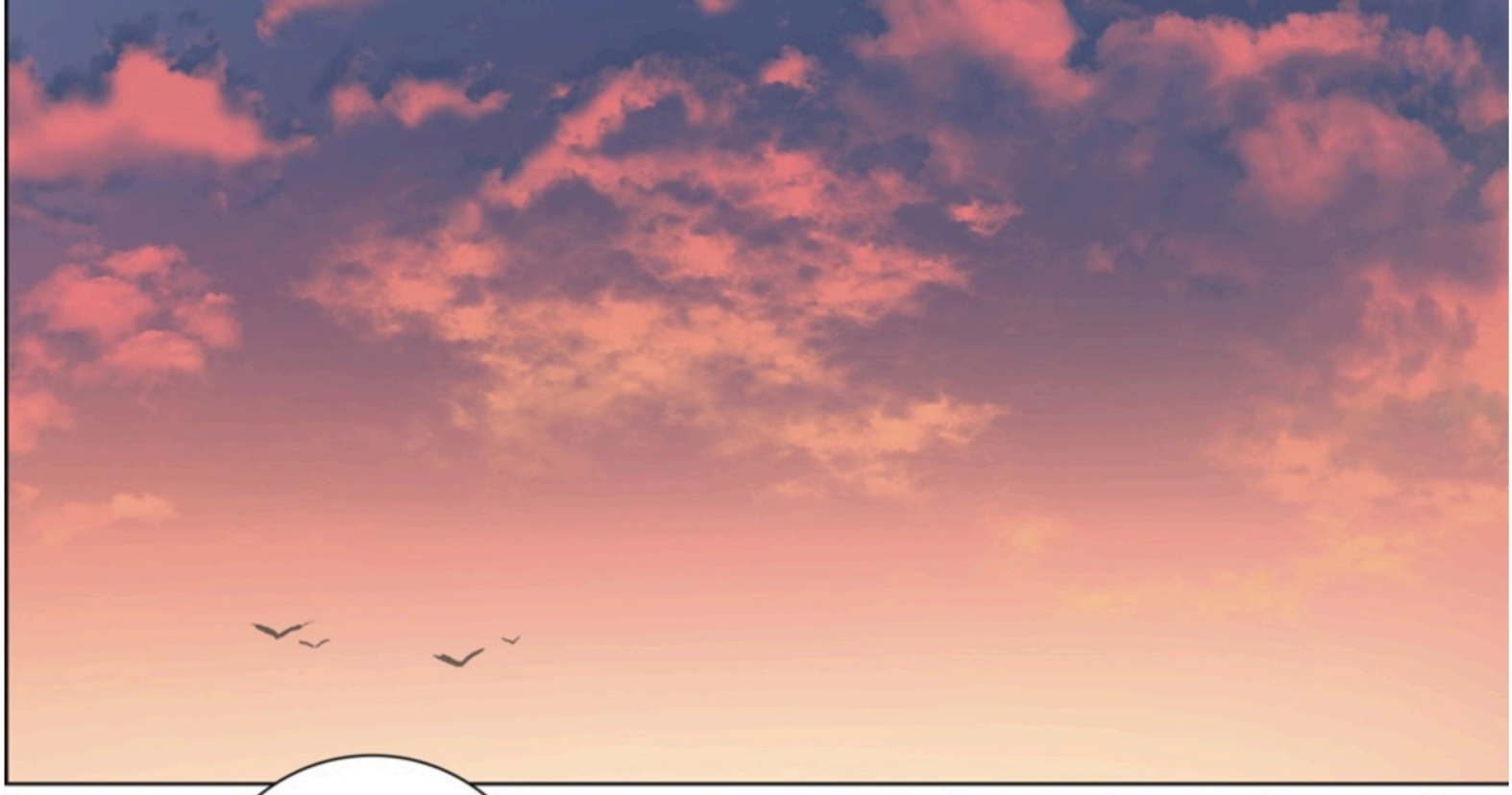
FWIP
HEY, HOW COULD YOU—?




DID SHE JUST LEAVE?
...YES, FATHER.

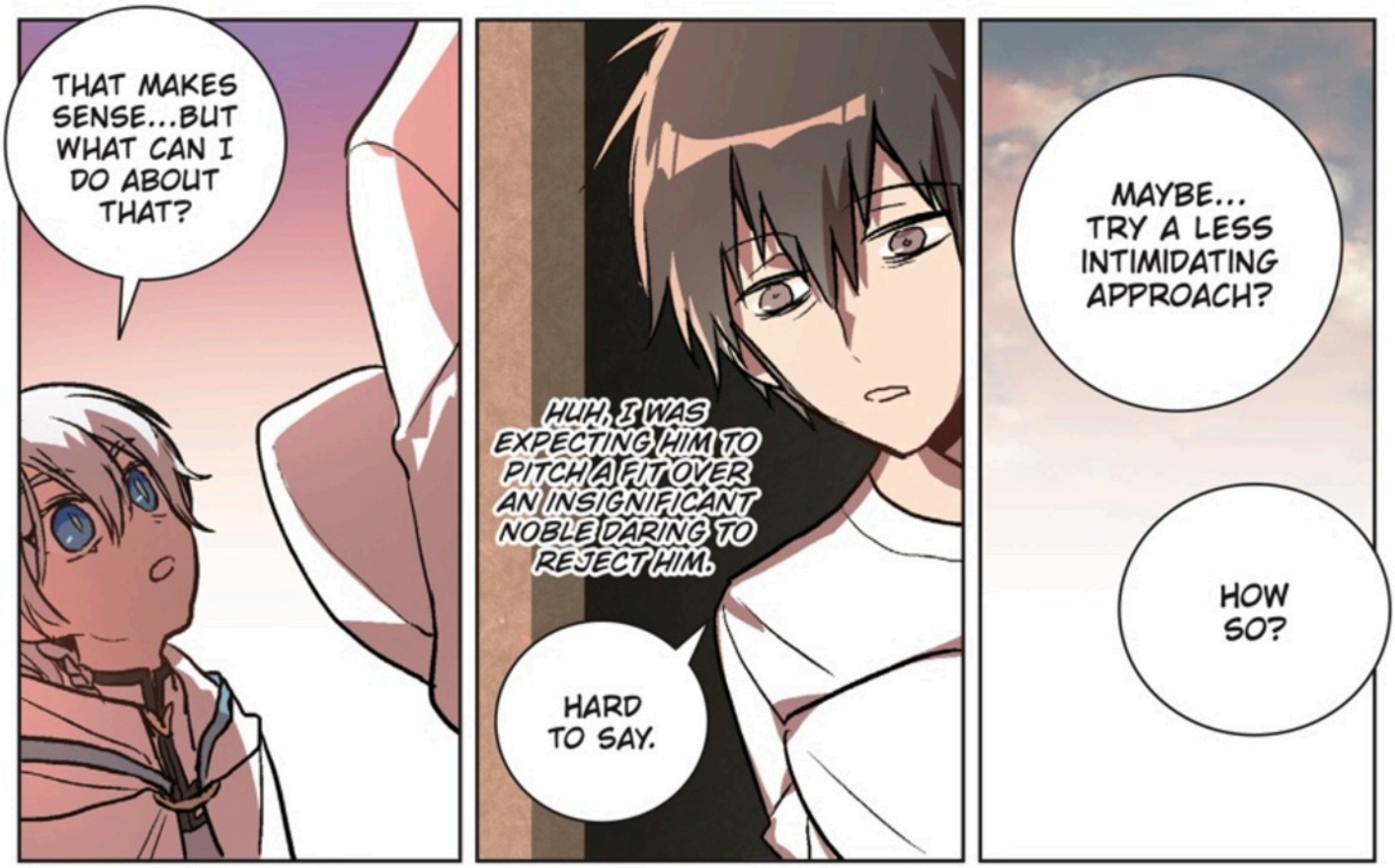
.....
YES, FATHER.

NO NEED TO REPEAT YOURSELF.
...YES, FATHER.



WHY DO YOU THINK SHE TURNED ME DOWN?

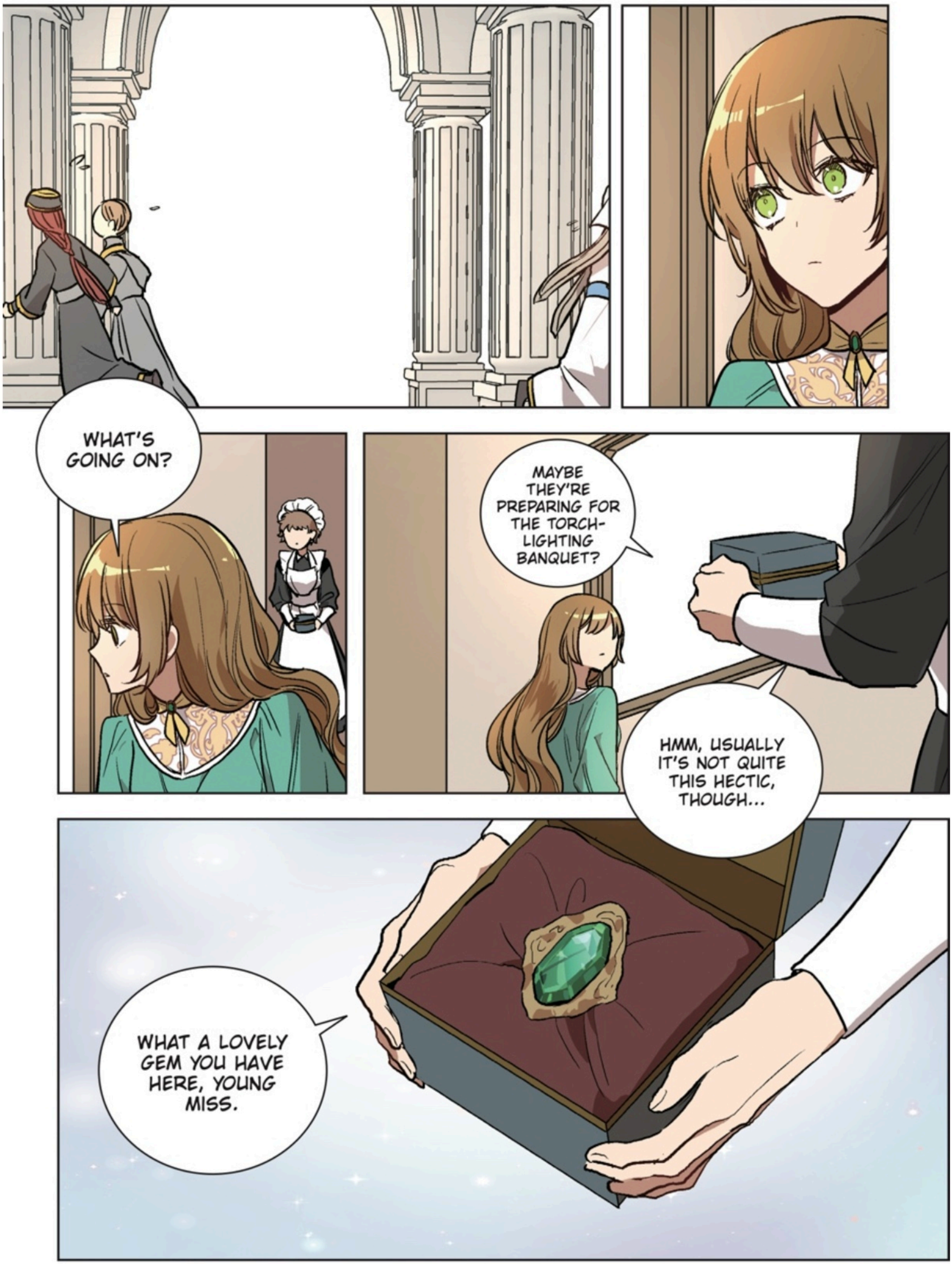
UH...
WHY'S THE OLD CRANK HERE AT THE CRACK OF DAWN...?!
PERHAPS SHE FELT INTIMIDATED?


THAT MAKES SENSE...BUT WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT THAT?
HUH, I WAS EXPECTING HIM TO PITCH A FIT OVER AN INSIGNIFICANT NOBLE DARING TO REJECT HIM.
HARD TO SAY.
MAYBE... TRY A LESS INTIMIDATING APPROACH?
HOW SO?

PERHAPS YOU COULD BE A BIT MORE PERSONABLE...
.....

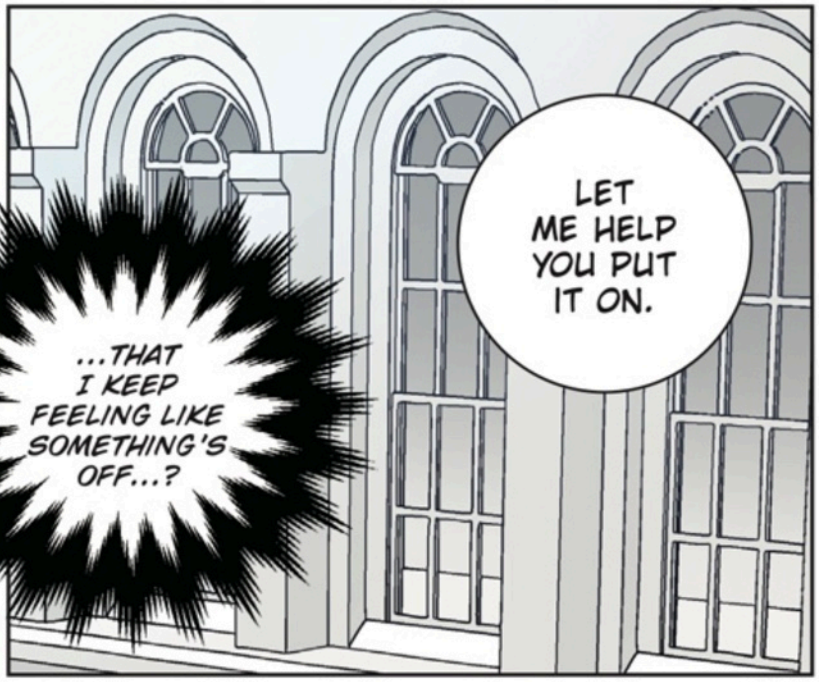
GASP!
THERE'S NO WAY THIS OBTUSE OLD PEDAGOGUE CAN USE SOCIAL GRACES!!

FATHER, PLEASE FORGIVE MY SLIP OF THE TON—
SO BE IT.
SO BE... WHAT?
IT'S CLEAR SHE STILL DOESN'T COMPREHEND JUST WHO I AM.
OPEN THE GATES TO THE HOLY DOMAIN.

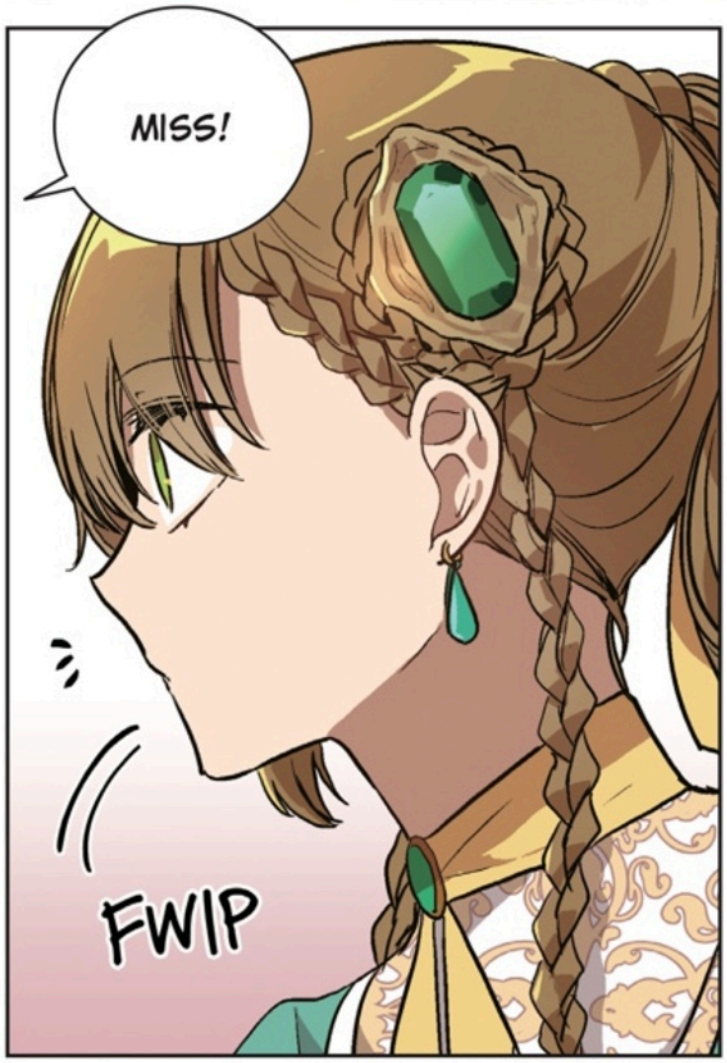

WHAT'S GOING ON?
MAYBE THEY'RE PREPARING FOR THE TORCH-LIGHTING BANQUET?
HMM, USUALLY IT'S NOT QUITE THIS HECTIC, THOUGH...
WHAT A LOVELY GEM YOU HAVE HERE, YOUNG MISS.

.....

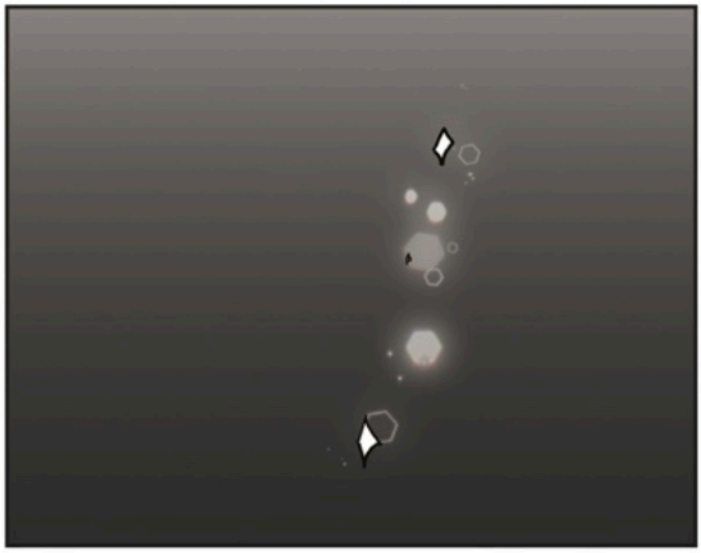
WHY IS IT...


...THAT I KEEP FEELING LIKE SOMETHING'S OFF...?
LET ME HELP YOU PUT IT ON.

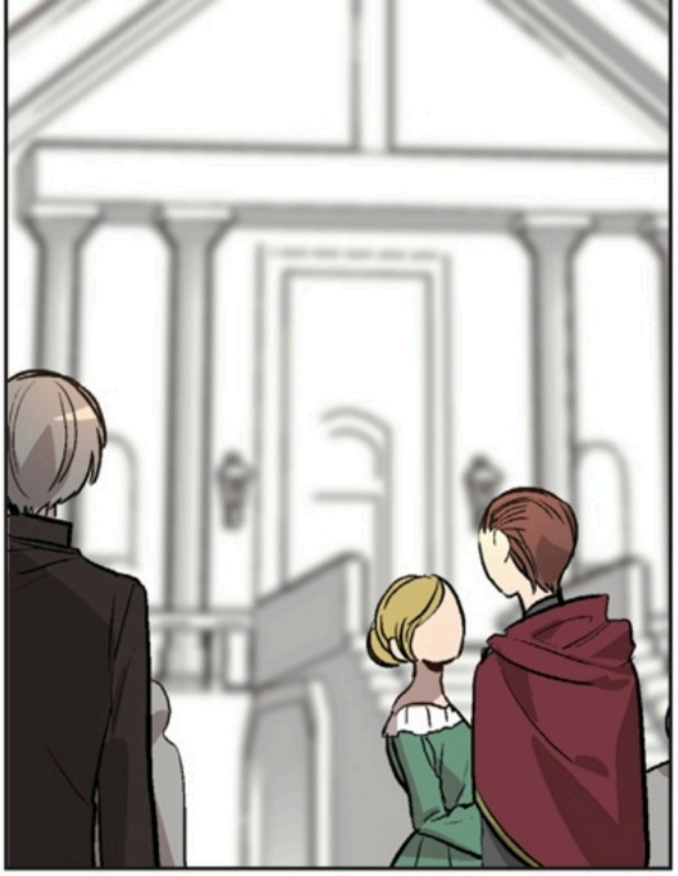
OH, IT LOOKS WONDERFUL ON YOU.

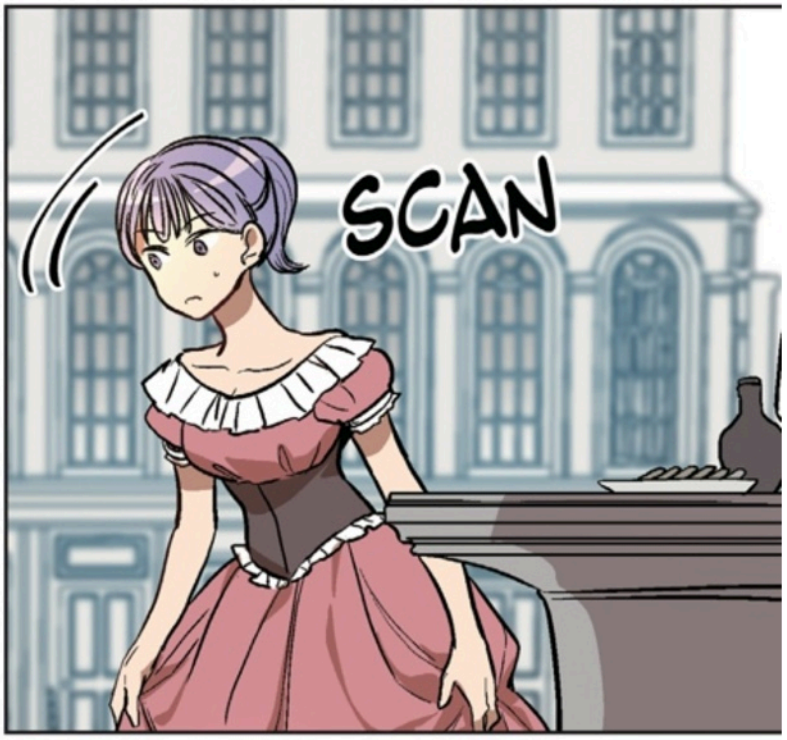

MISS!
FWIP

GLINT

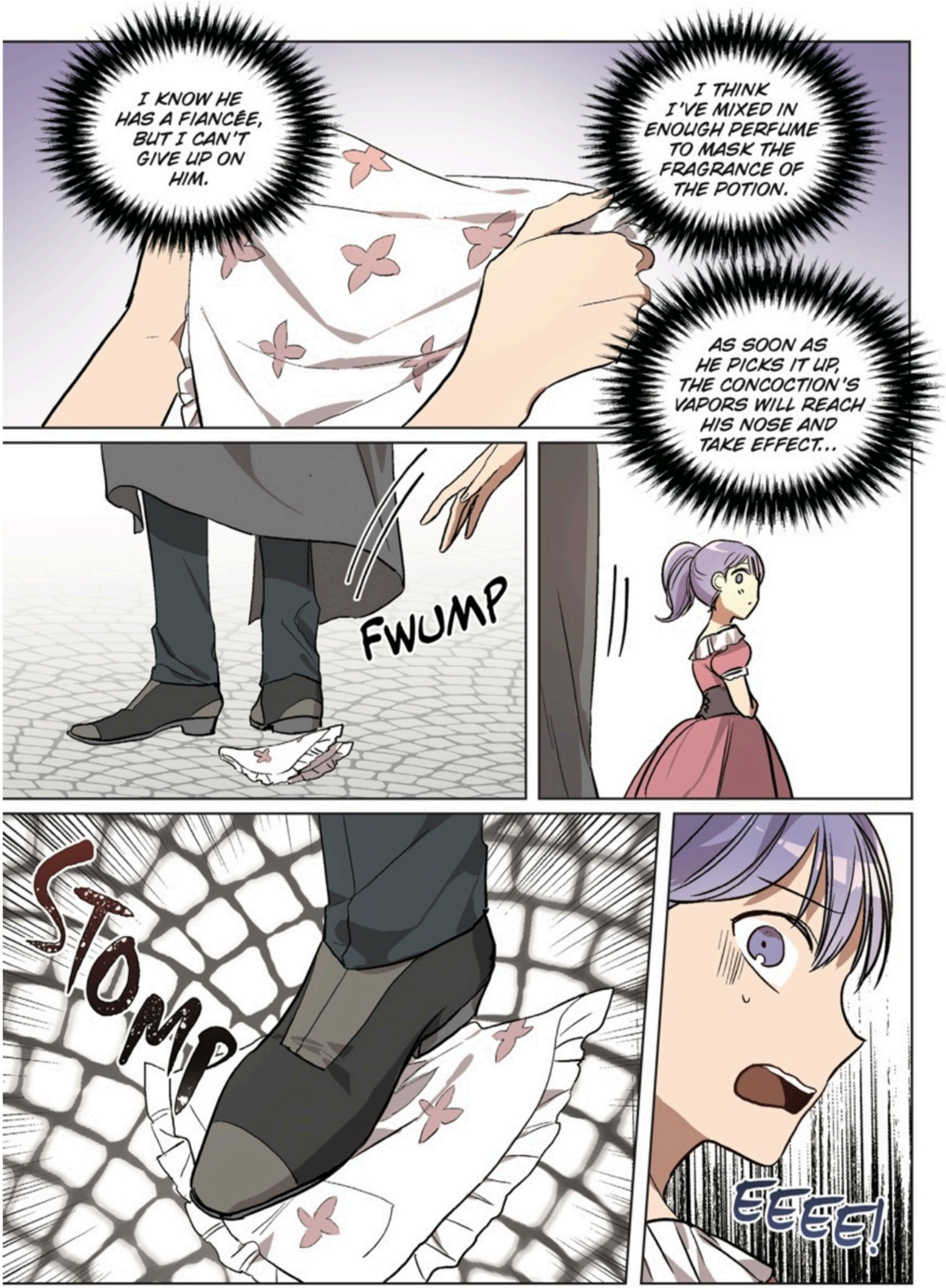


Why Raeliana Ended Up at the Duke's Mansion



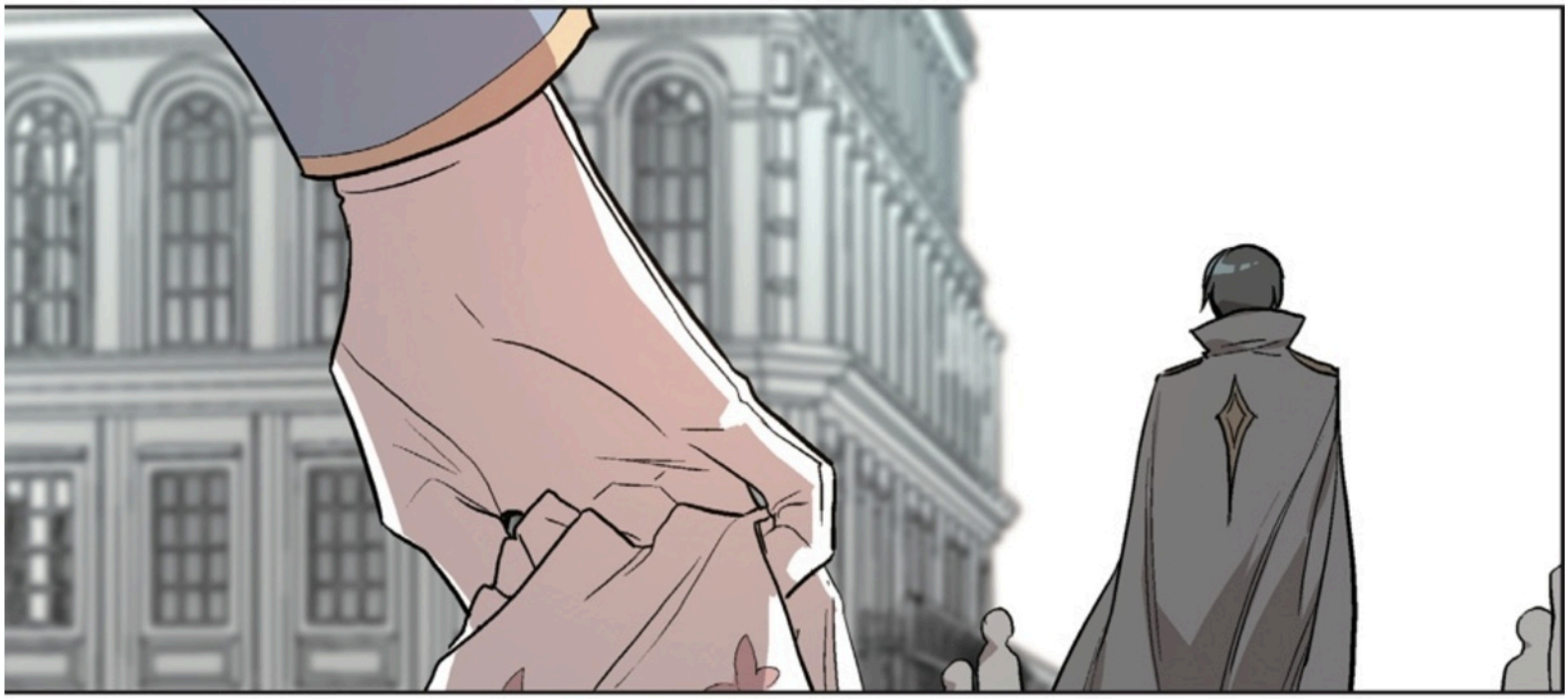

SCAN

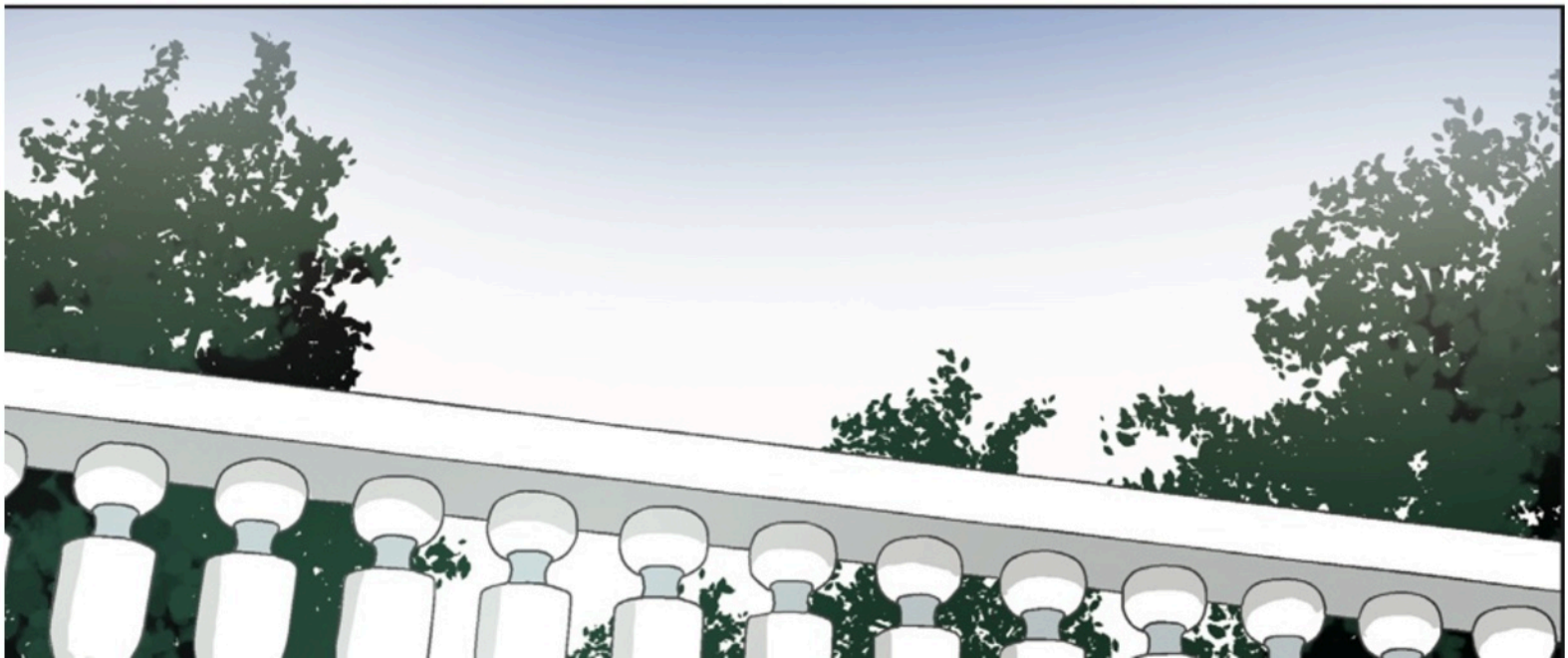
TODAY'S THE DAY.

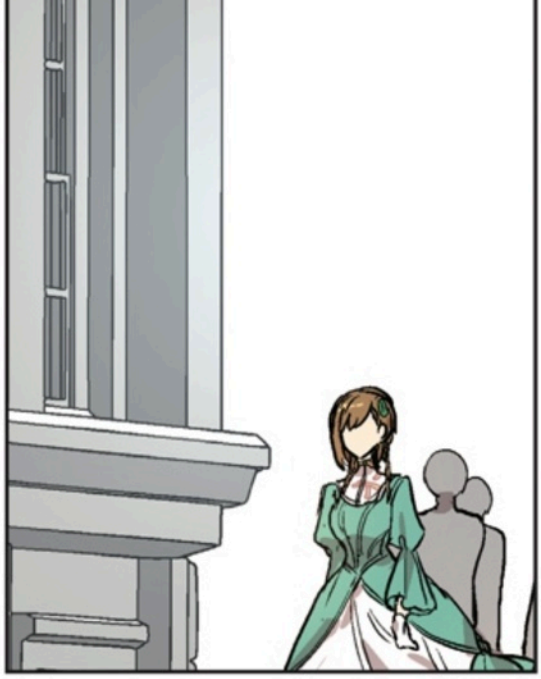

I KNOW HE HAS A FIANCÉE, BUT I CAN'T GIVE UP ON HIM.
I THINK I'VE MIXED IN ENOUGH PERFUME TO MASK THE FRAGRANCE OF THE POTION.
AS SOON AS HE PICKS IT UP, THE CONCOCTION'S VAPORS WILL REACH HIS NOSE AND TAKE EFFECT...
FWUMP
STOMP
EEEE!

DUKE WYNKNIGHT!
YOU'VE STEPPED ON LADY FEYLIN'S HANDKERCHIEF!
OH DEAR.
COUNT WESTERN-BERG.
PASS ALONG MY APOLOGIES TO THE LADY WHO MISPLACED IT.
AND TELL HER SHE'LL BE COMPENSATED IN FULL.

...WILL DO.



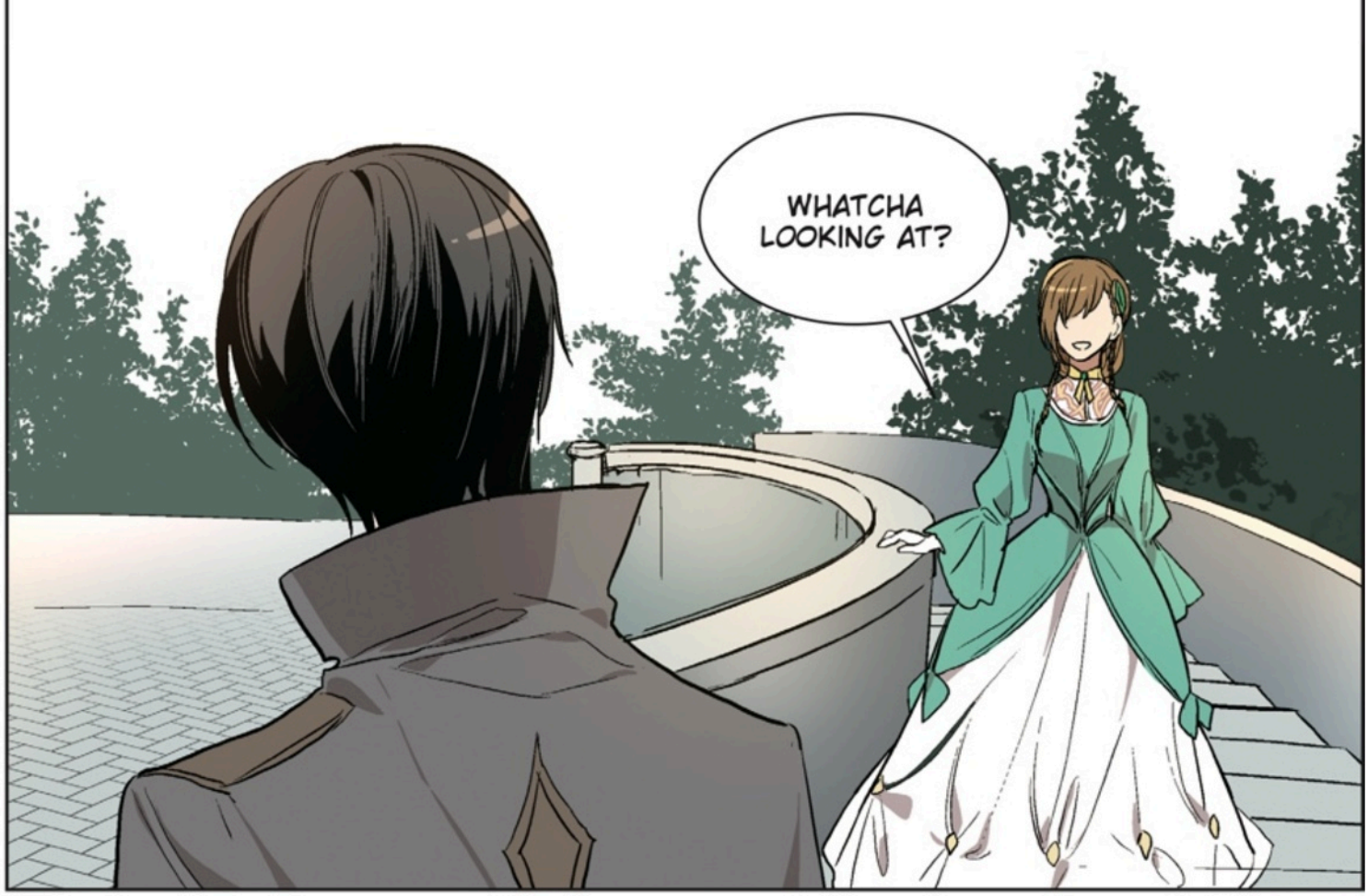




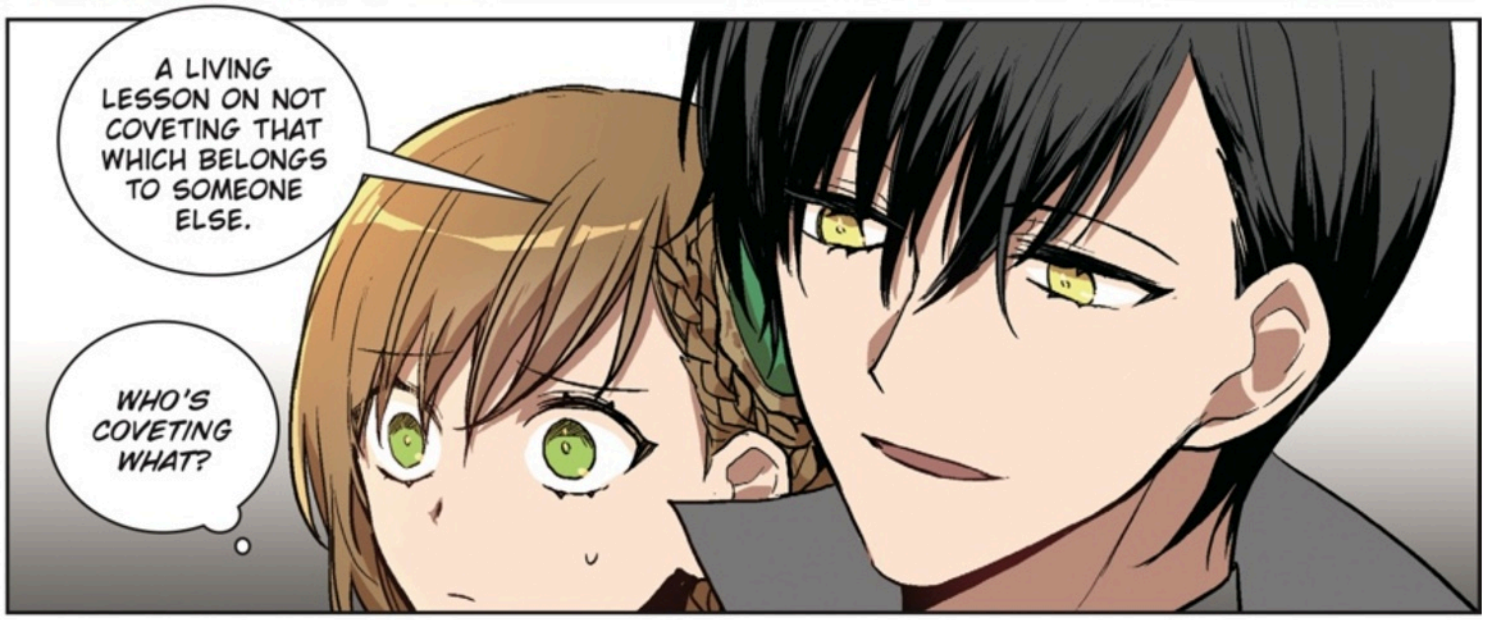
YOU'RE LATE.

IT'S BEEN A WHILE.

I'LL SAY.

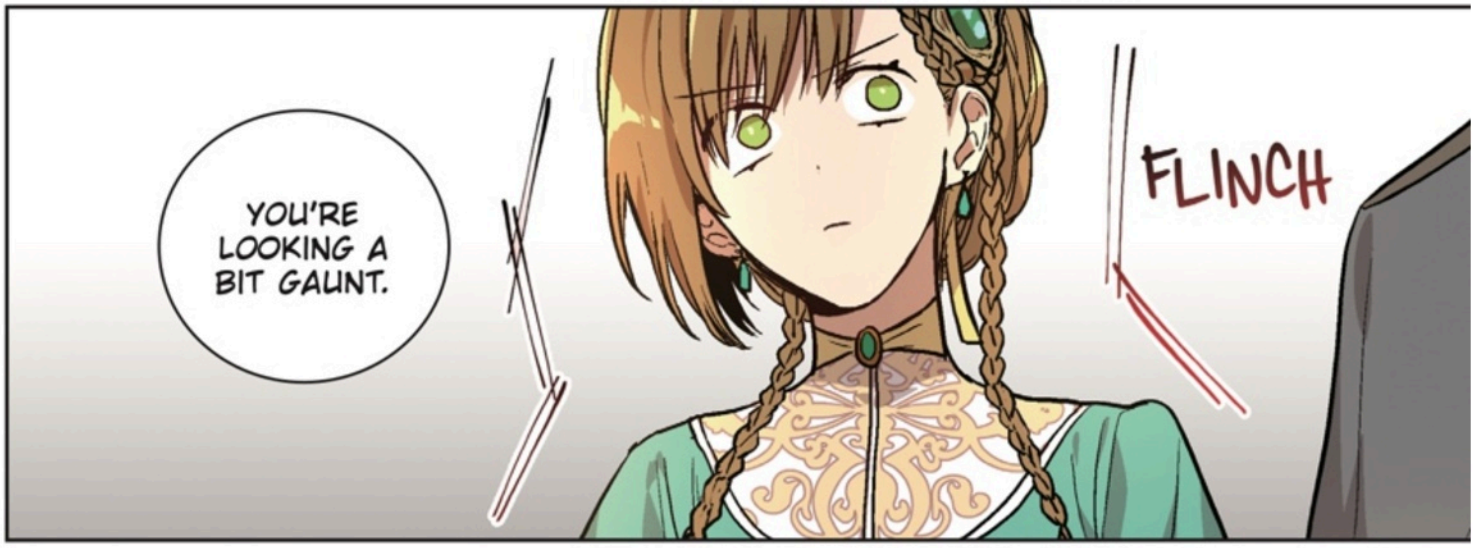

WHATCHA LOOKING AT?

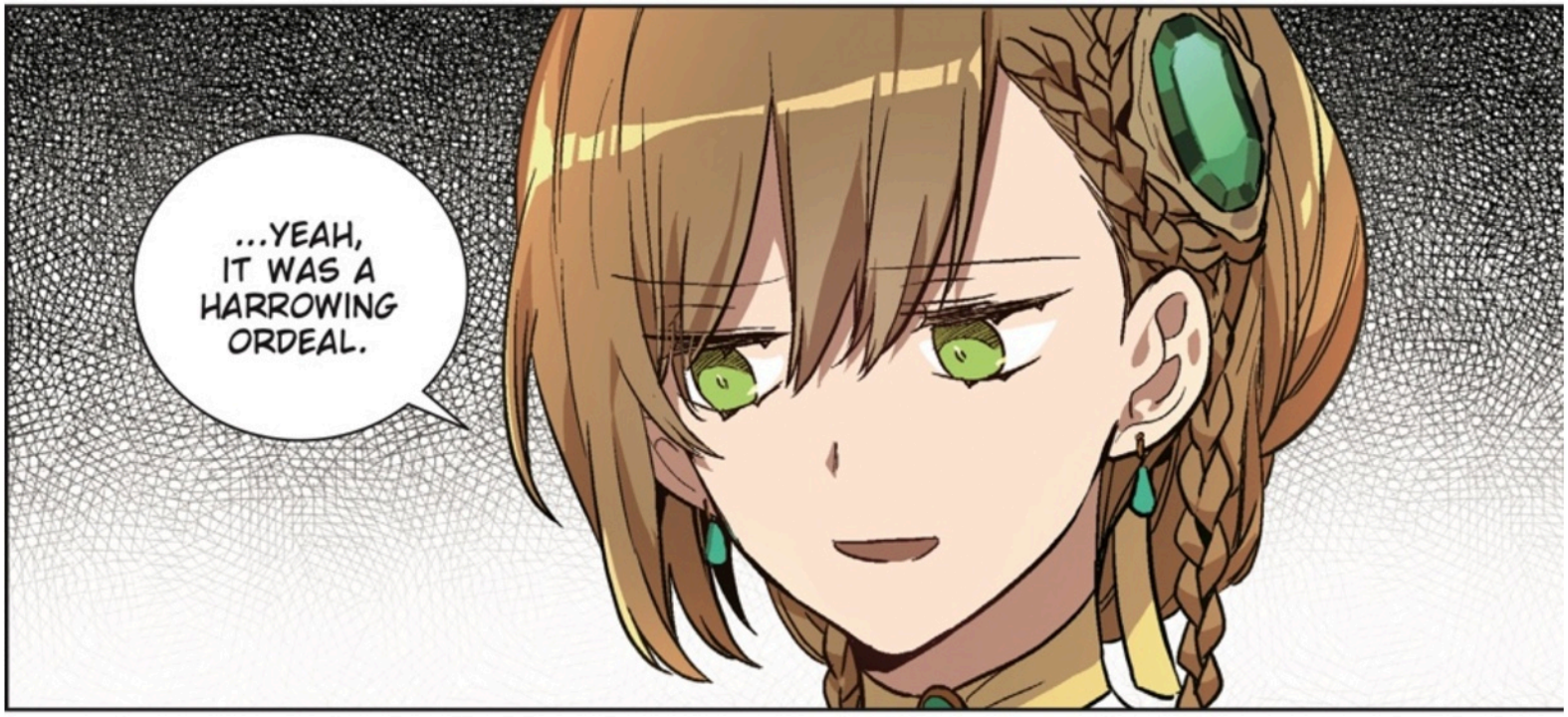
NOD

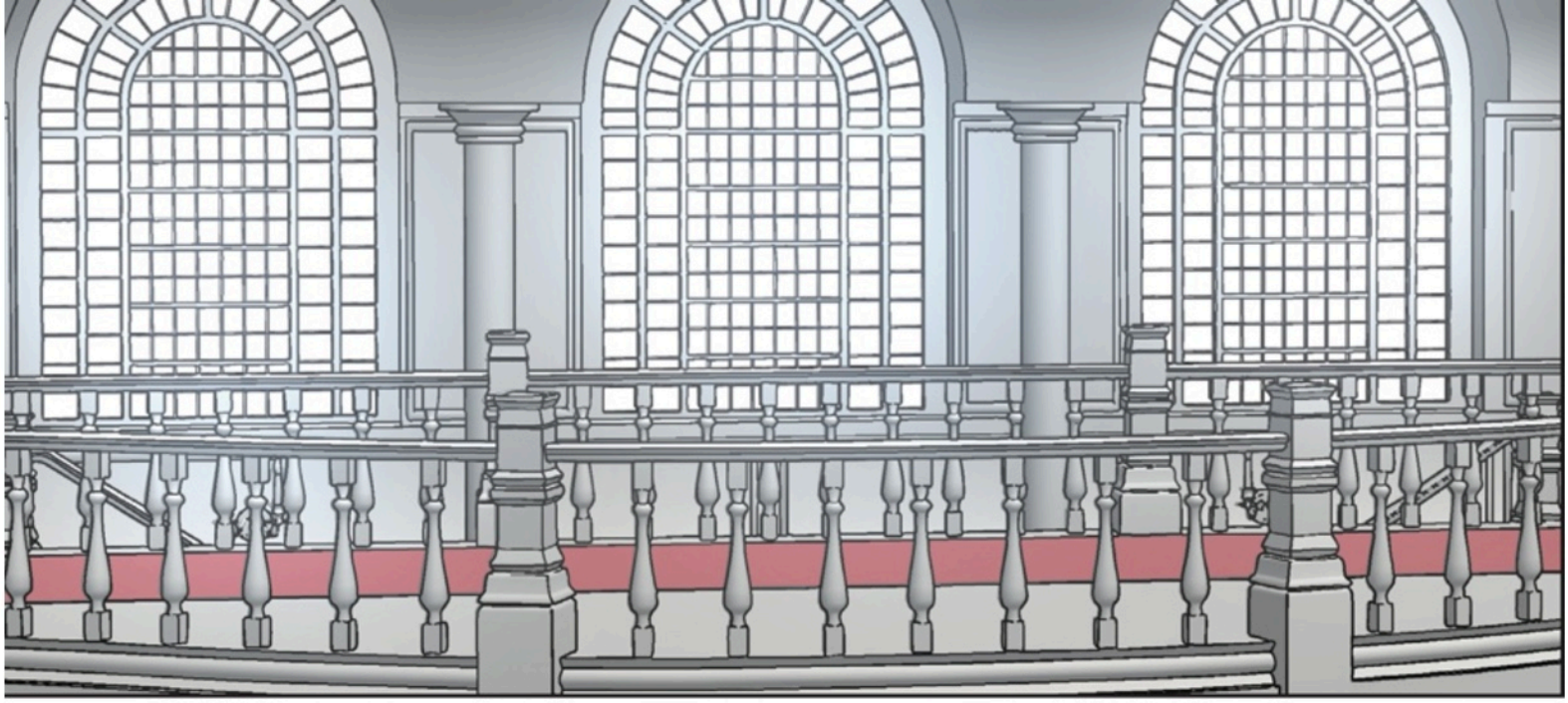

A LIVING LESSON ON NOT COVETING THAT WHICH BELONGS TO SOMEONE ELSE.
WHO'S COVETING WHAT?

SLIP

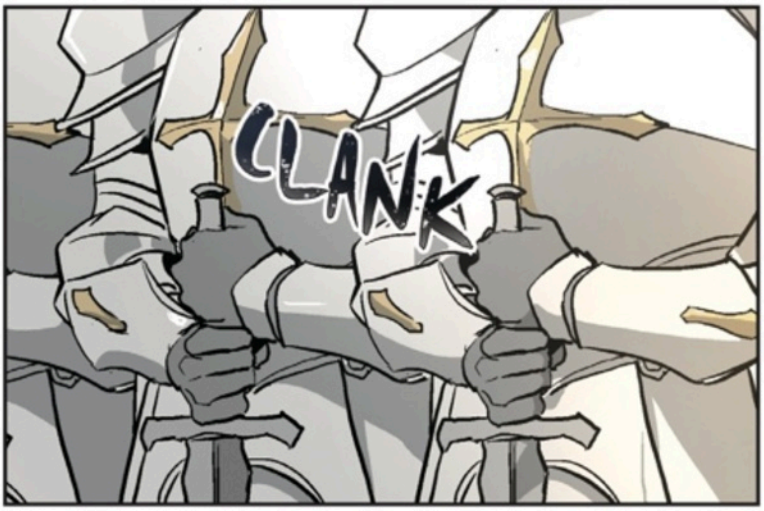
SHALL WE GO?
OKAY.

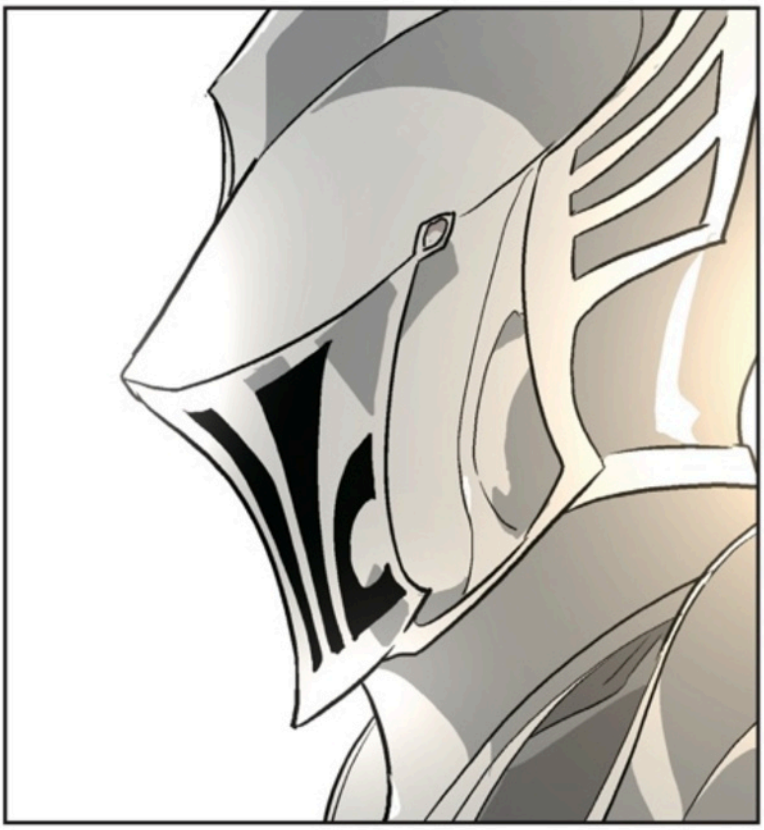

YOU'RE LOOKING A BIT GAUNT.
FLINCH


...YEAH, IT WAS A HARROWING ORDEAL.



THE VIBE IN HERE'S A BIT... WEIRD?

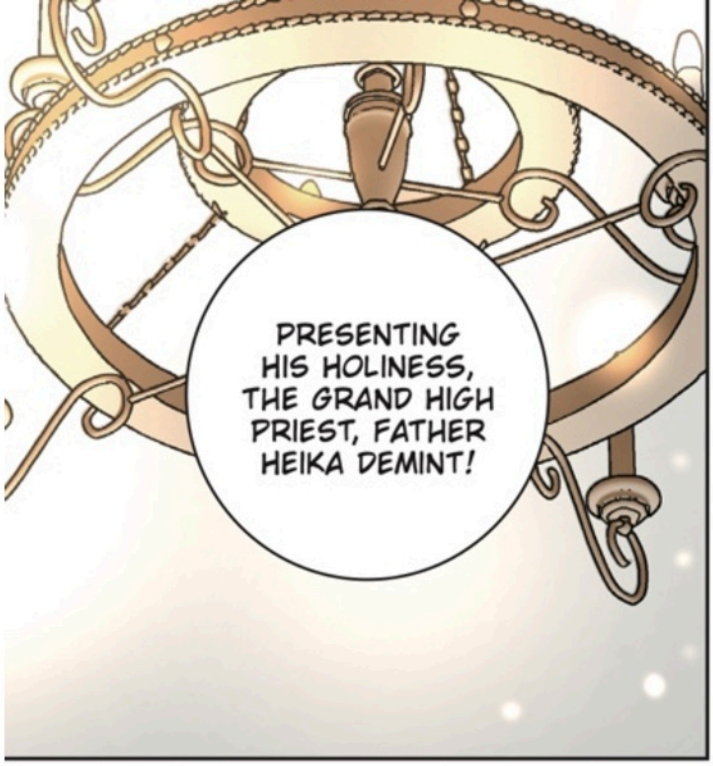

CLANK



THOSE ARE THE HOLY KNIGHTS, AREN'T THEY? THE ELITE GROUP WHO ALMOST NEVER LEAVES THE HOLY DOMAIN...

THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO BE A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME TYPE OF SIGHT. WHAT'RE THEY DOING HERE?

RAELIANA.

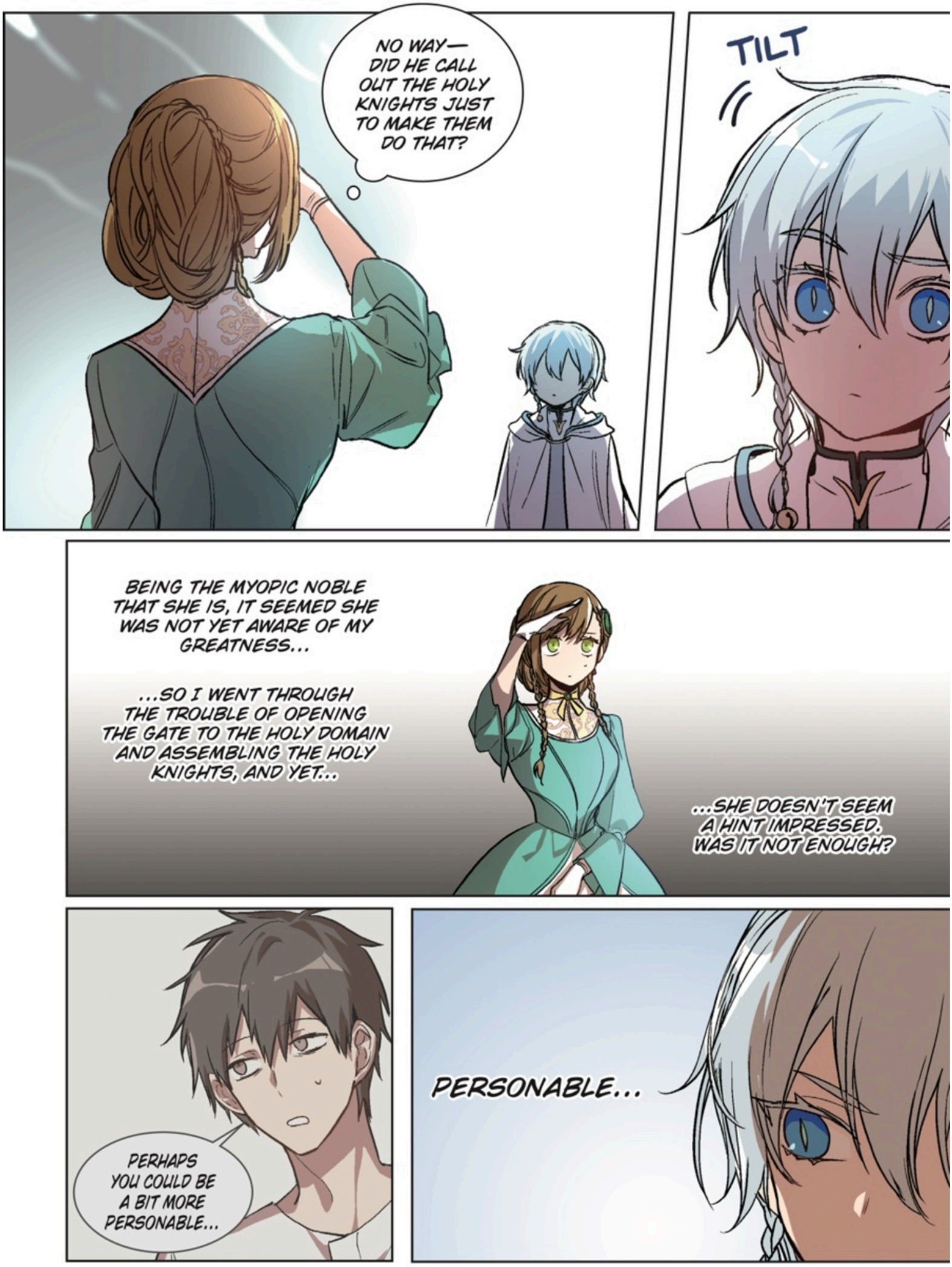

PRESENTING HIS HOLINESS, THE GRAND HIGH PRIEST, FATHER HEIKA DEMINT!

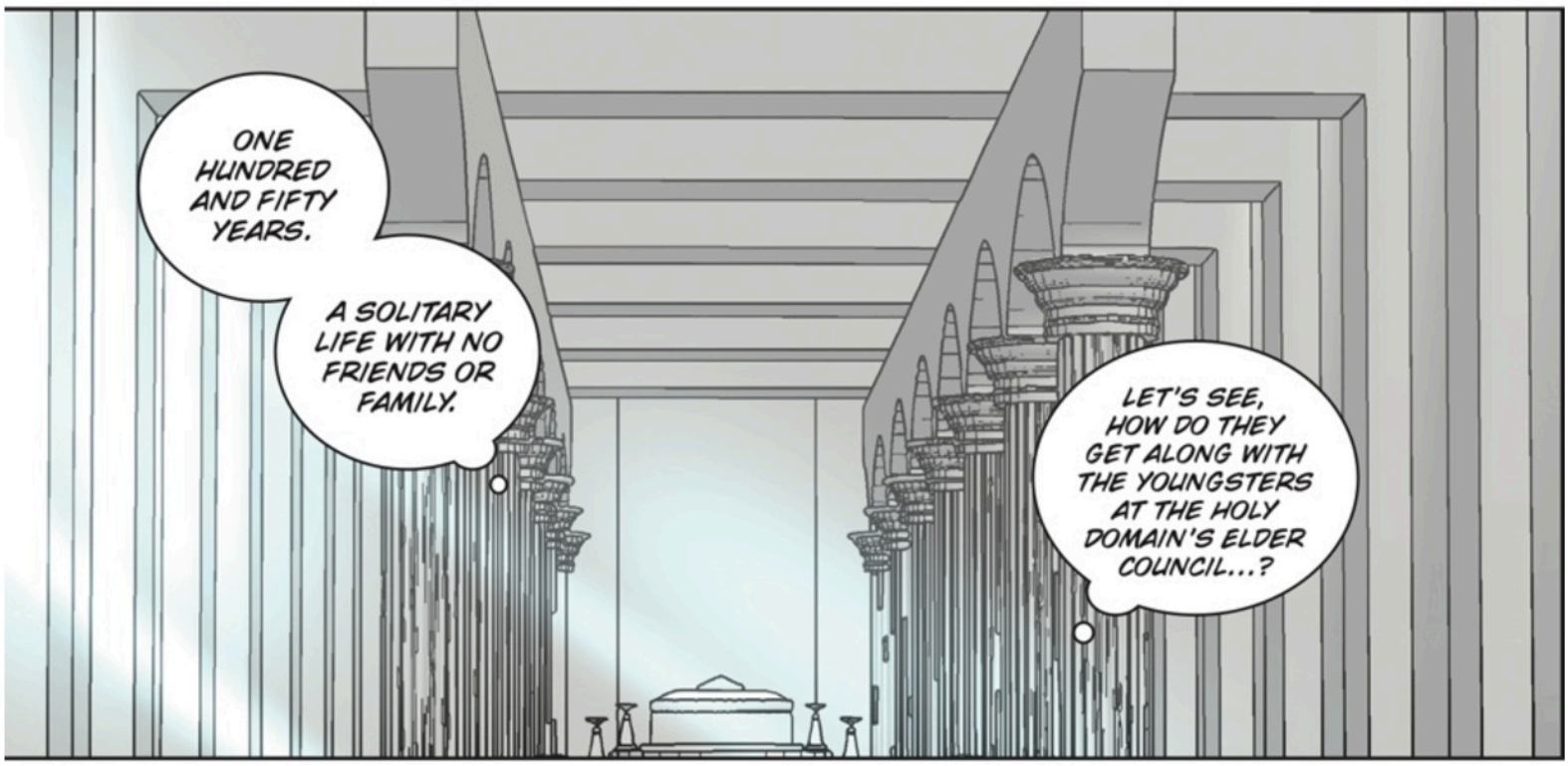
SHINK

SHINK

FLAAASH

SO BRIGHT.


NO WAY— DID HE CALL OUT THE HOLY KNIGHTS JUST TO MAKE THEM DO THAT?
TILT
BEING THE MYOPIC NOBLE THAT SHE IS, IT SEEMED SHE WAS NOT YET AWARE OF MY GREATNESS...
...SO I WENT THROUGH THE TROUBLE OF OPENING THE GATE TO THE HOLY DOMAIN AND ASSEMBLING THE HOLY KNIGHTS, AND YET...
...SHE DOESN'T SEEM A HINT IMPRESSED. WAS IT NOT ENOUGH?
PERHAPS YOU COULD BE A BIT MORE PERSONABLE...
PERSONABLE...



LATELY, MY GRANDDAUGHTER HAS BEEN TAGGING BEHIND ME ALL DAY, GOING "GRANDPA, GRANDPA." IT'S JUST TOO SWEET.

YOUR GRANDDAUGHTER'S STILL THAT YOUNG? DID SHE STOP GROWING OR SOMETHING?

SO YOU'RE THE ONE NOT ACTING YOUR AGE.

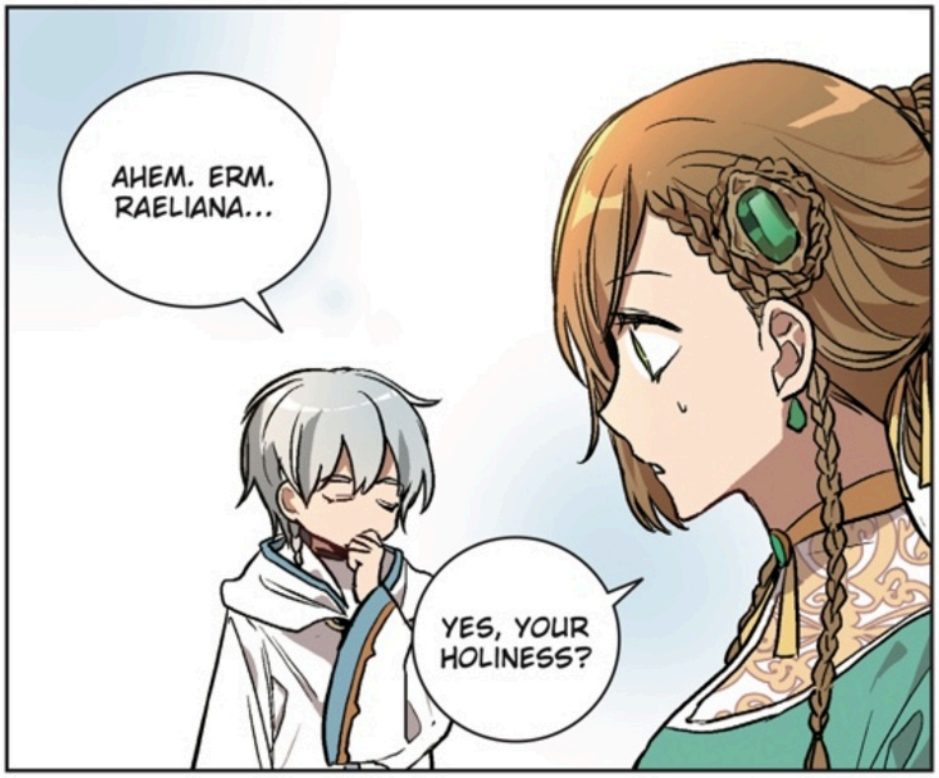
WELL, SHE WAS BORN WHEN I WAS EIGHTY, FATHER — OF COURSE SHE'S STILL LITTLE. DOESN'T SHE SOUND PRECIOUS?

OH, AND TAKE A LOOK AT THIS KIDDO. I'LL BRING HIM BY SOON. ADORABLE, IS HE NOT?

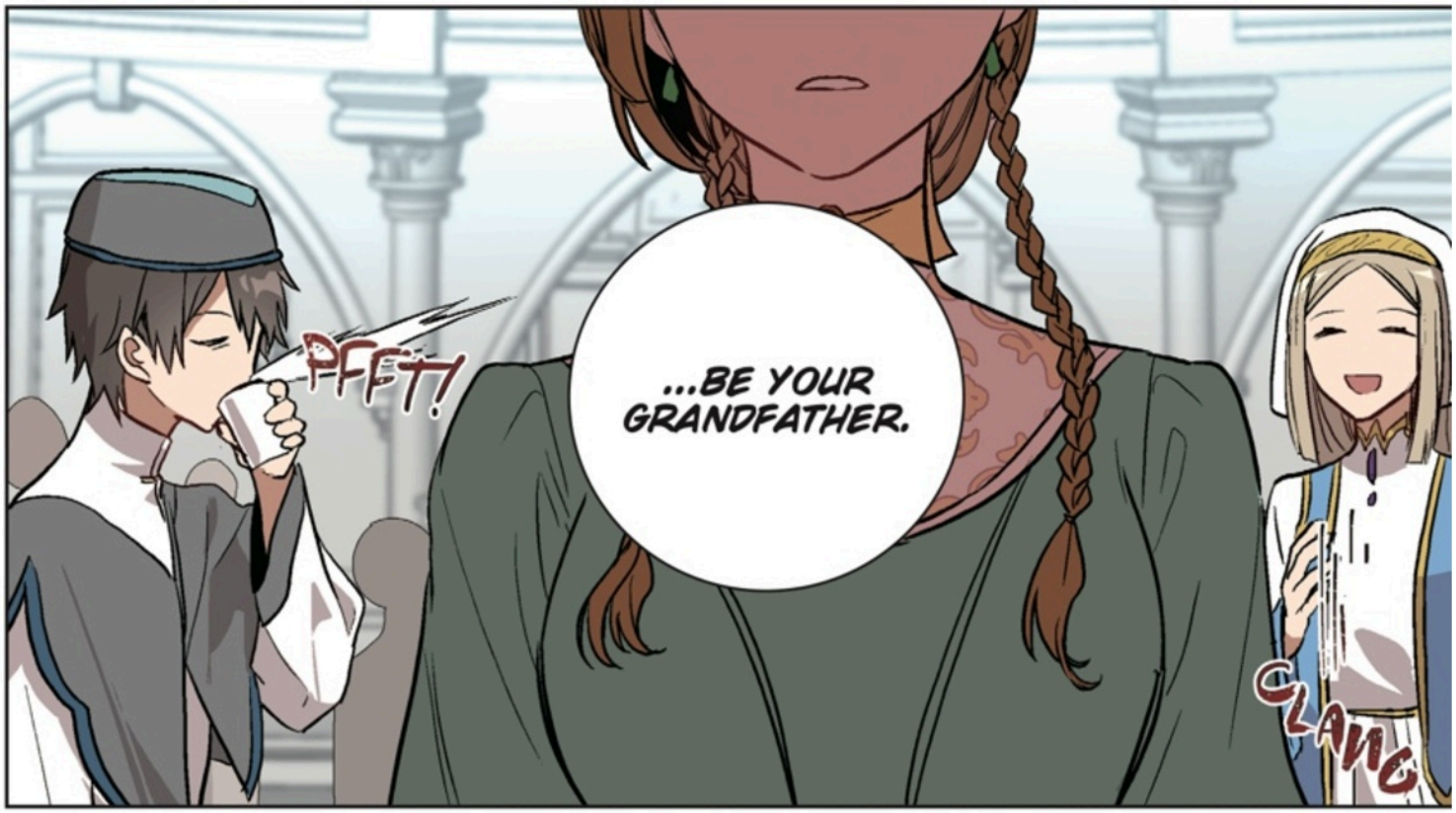
YOU'RE GOING SENILE. WHAT ARE YOU, A COLLECTOR OF KIDS?

HONESTLY, FATHER. YOU JUST DON'T KNOW THE JOY THAT COMES FROM RAISING THEM. HERE, LOOK AT HIM. SO CUTE!

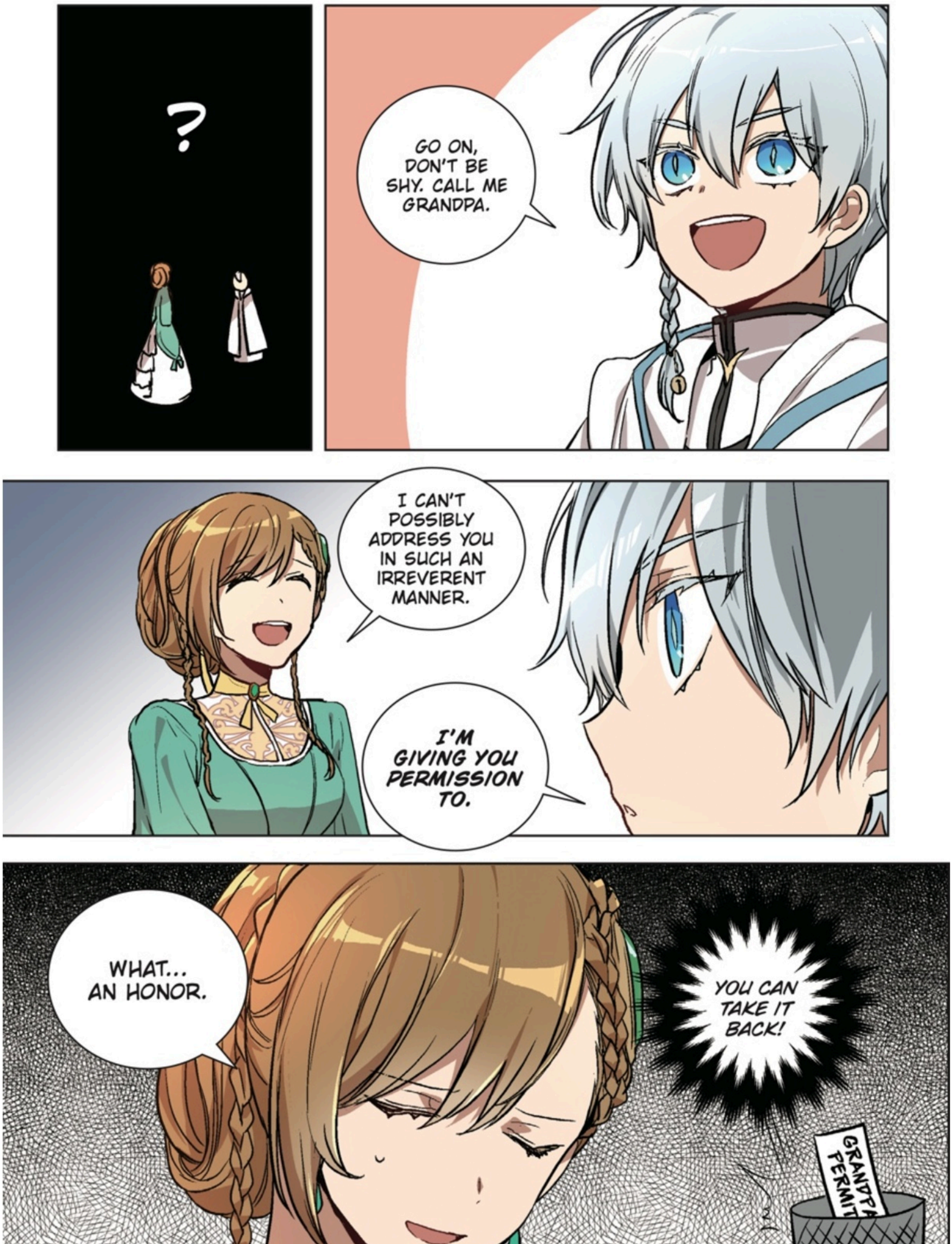
CUTE? THAT LITTLE INSECT? NO WAY. I HAVE NO USE FOR SUCH THINGS.


AHEM. ERM. RAELIANA...
YES, YOUR HOLINESS?

HERE'S WHAT I'LL DO. I SHALL...


PFFT!
...BE YOUR GRANDFATHER.
CLANG

SHATTER
TINK
SMASH


?
GO ON, DON'T BE SHY. CALL ME GRANDPA.
I CAN'T POSSIBLY ADDRESS YOU IN SUCH AN IRREVERENT MANNER.
I'M GIVING YOU PERMISSION TO.
WHAT... AN HONOR.
YOU CAN TAKE IT BACK!

HOLD ON, FATHER.

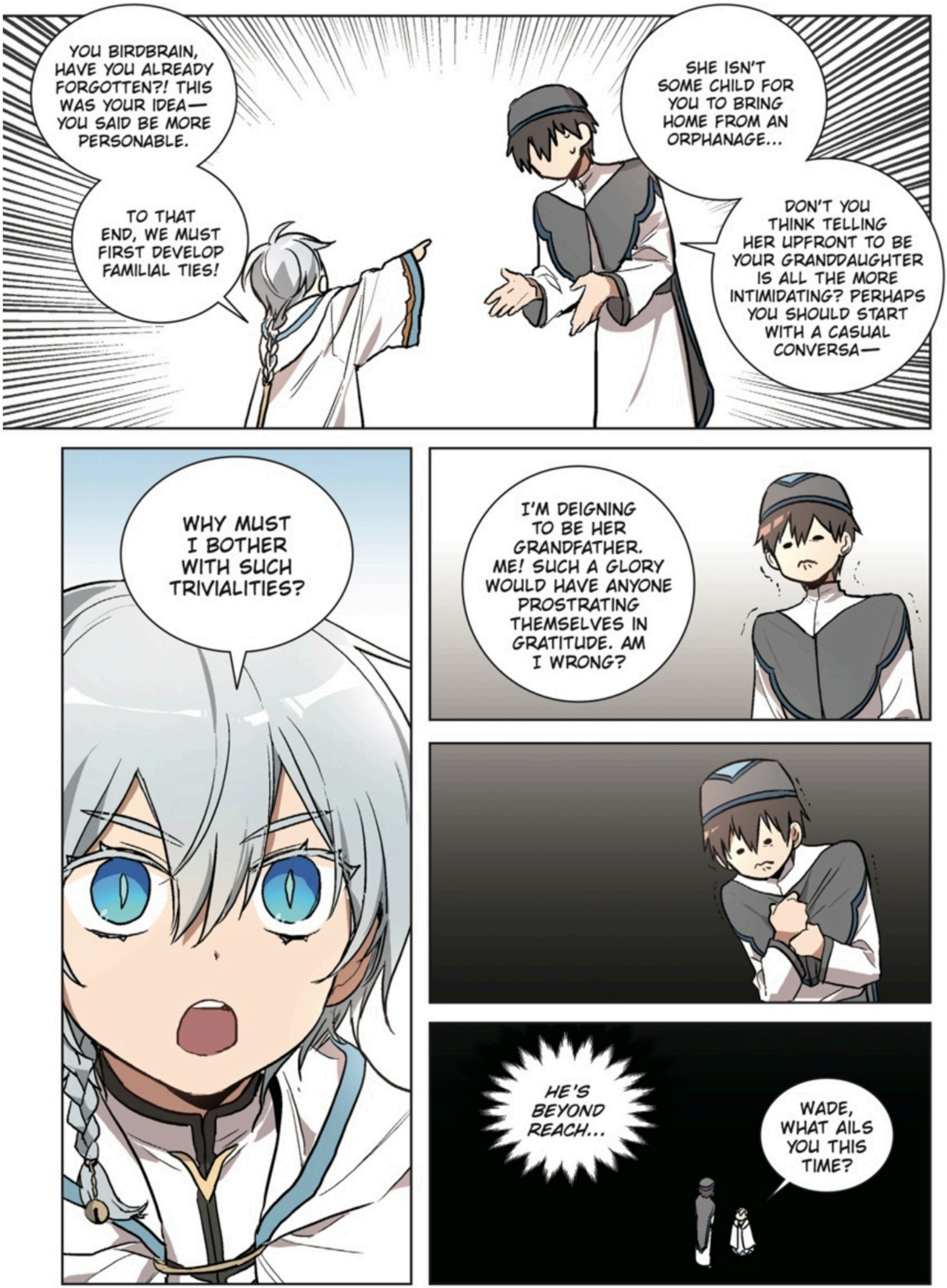
WHERE EXACTLY ARE YOU GOING WITH THIS "GRANDPA" THING?

LOOK AT OUR AGE GAP. DON'T YOU THINK I'M TOO OLD TO BE CALLED "DAD"?
I'M NOT SHAMELESS, WADE.

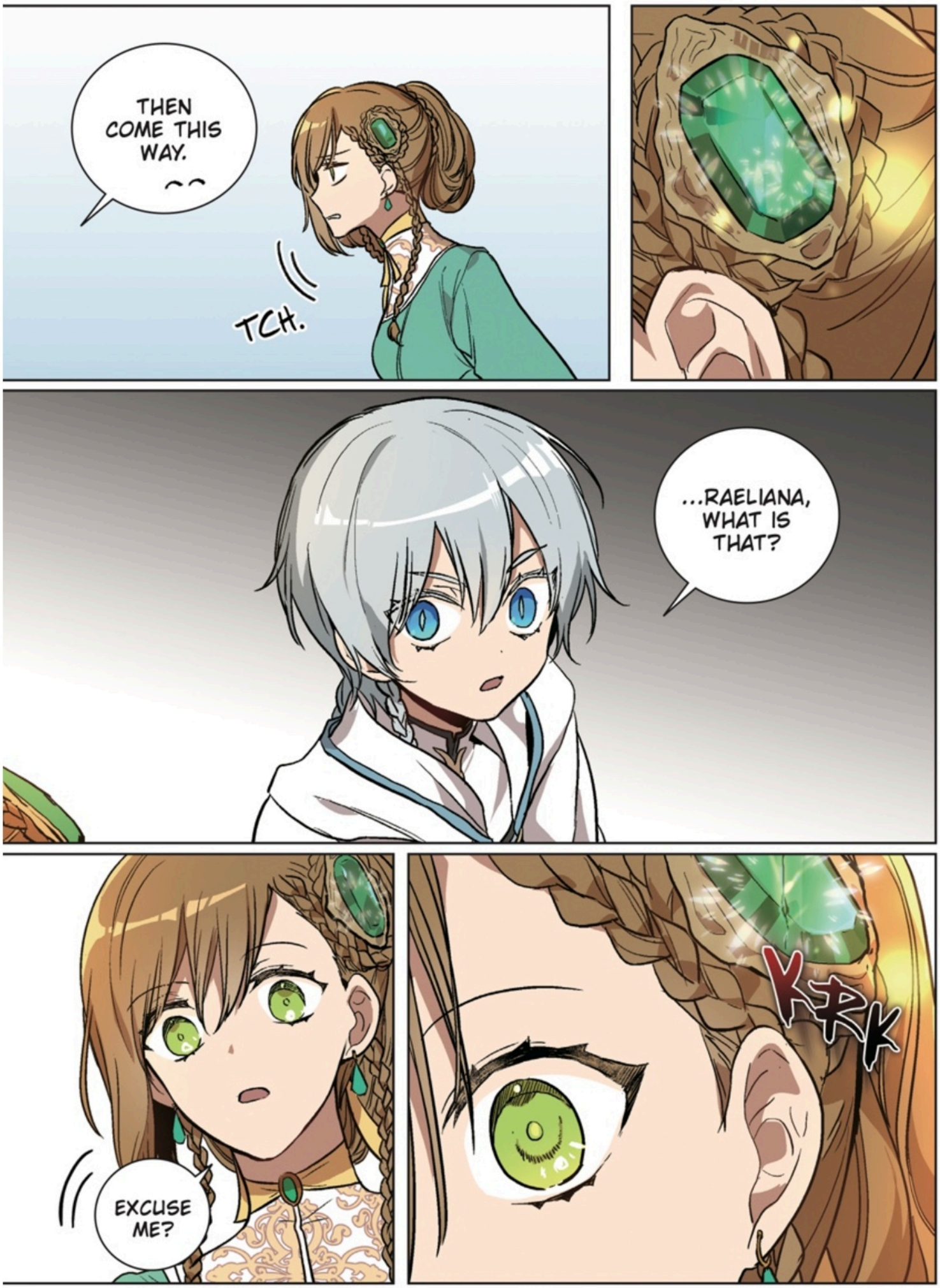
TRUE, DAD WOULD BE A BIT MUCH.
THOUGH CONSIDERING YOUR AGE, MAYBE EVEN GRANDPA ISN'T...

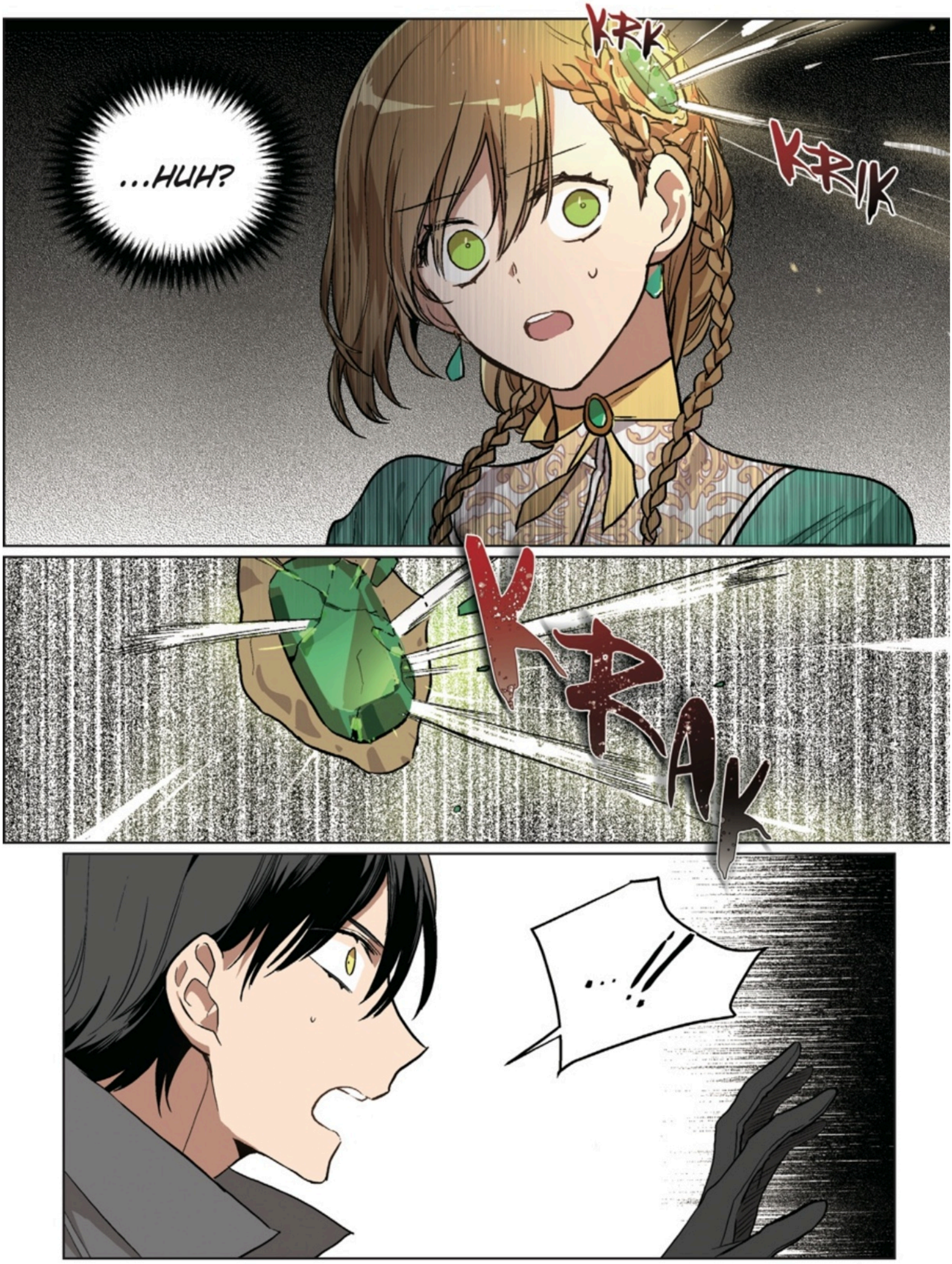
WAIT! NO! NOT THE POINT!

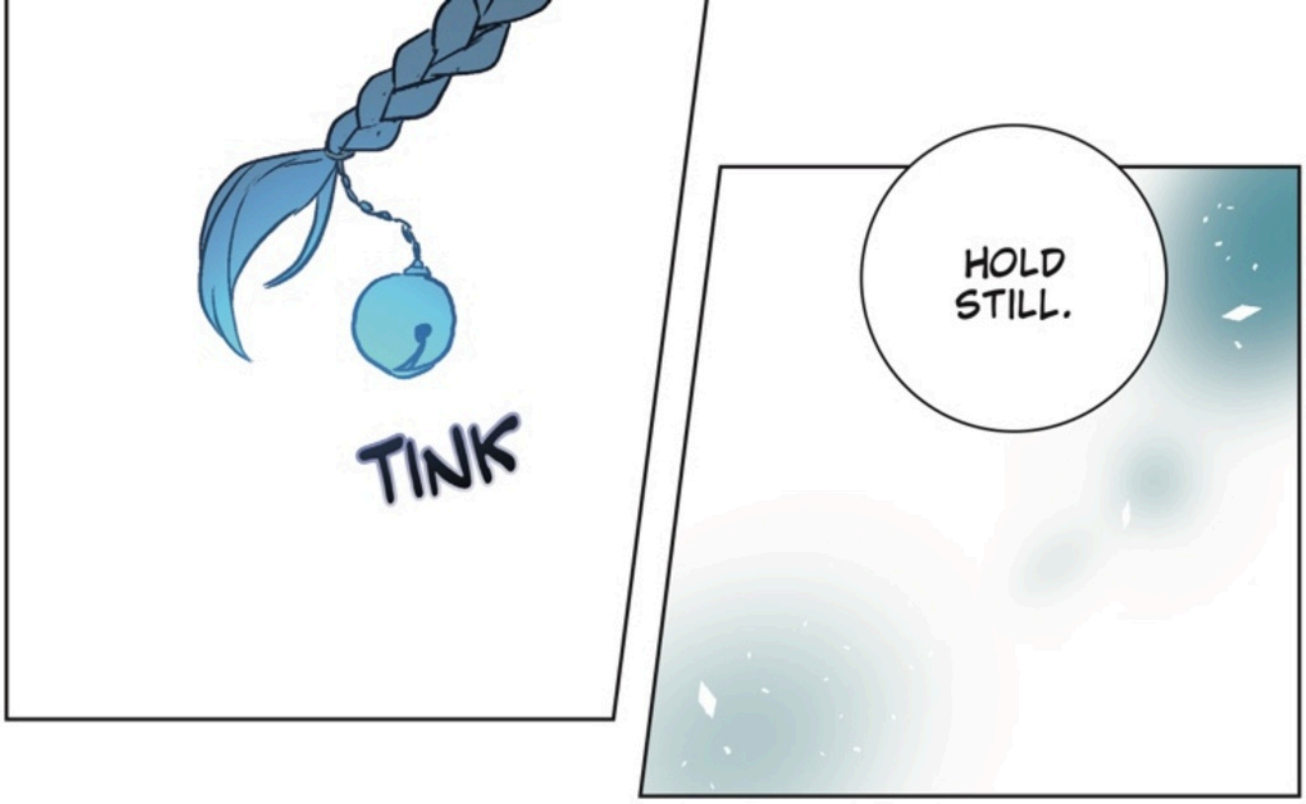
I'M ASKING, YOUR HOLINESS, WHAT THE MEANING BEHIND THIS SUDDEN GRANDFATHER-AND-GRANDDAUGHTER IDEA IS.

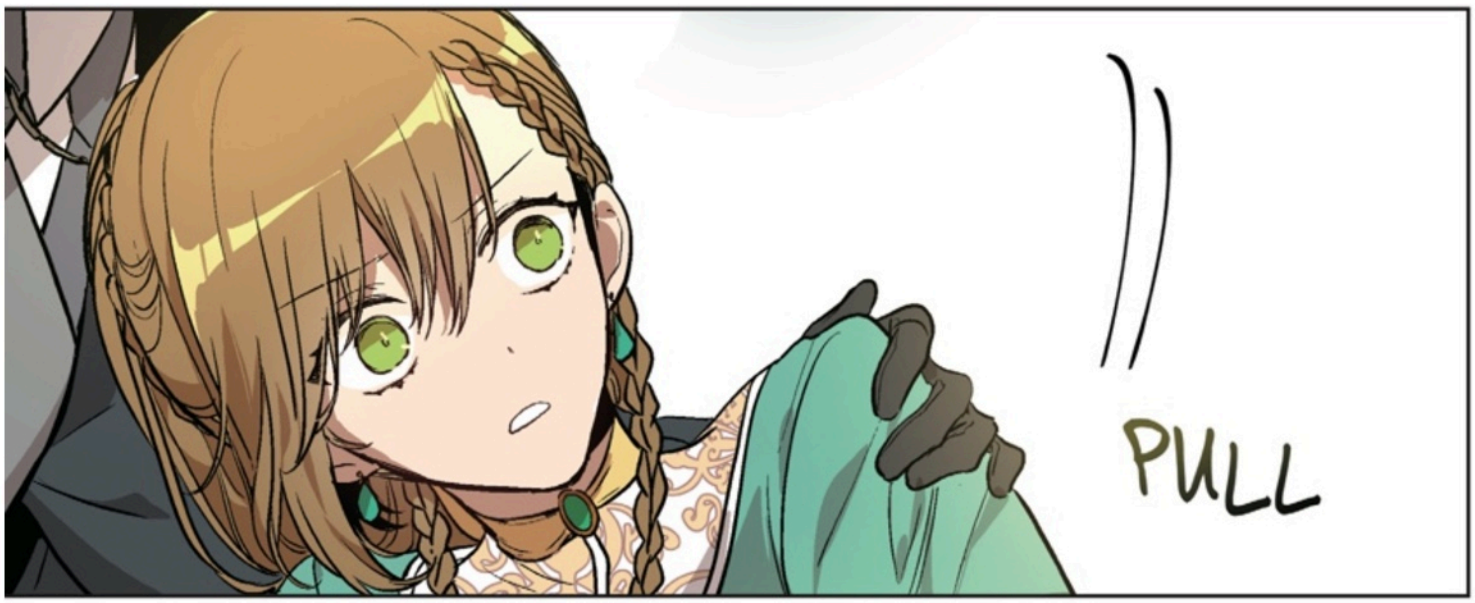

YOU BIRDBRAIN, HAVE YOU ALREADY FORGOTTEN?! THIS WAS YOUR IDEA— YOU SAID BE MORE PERSONABLE.
TO THAT END, WE MUST FIRST DEVELOP FAMILIAL TIES!
SHE ISN'T SOME CHILD FOR YOU TO BRING HOME FROM AN ORPHANAGE...
DON'T YOU THINK TELLING HER UPFRONT TO BE YOUR GRANDDAUGHTER IS ALL THE MORE INTIMIDATING? PERHAPS YOU SHOULD START WITH A CASUAL CONVERSA—
WHY MUST I BOTHER WITH SUCH TRIVIALITIES?
I'M DEIGNING TO BE HER GRANDFATHER. ME! SUCH A GLORY WOULD HAVE ANYONE PROSTRATING THEMSELVES IN GRATITUDE. AM I WRONG?
HE'S BEYOND REACH...
WADE, WHAT AILS YOU THIS TIME?

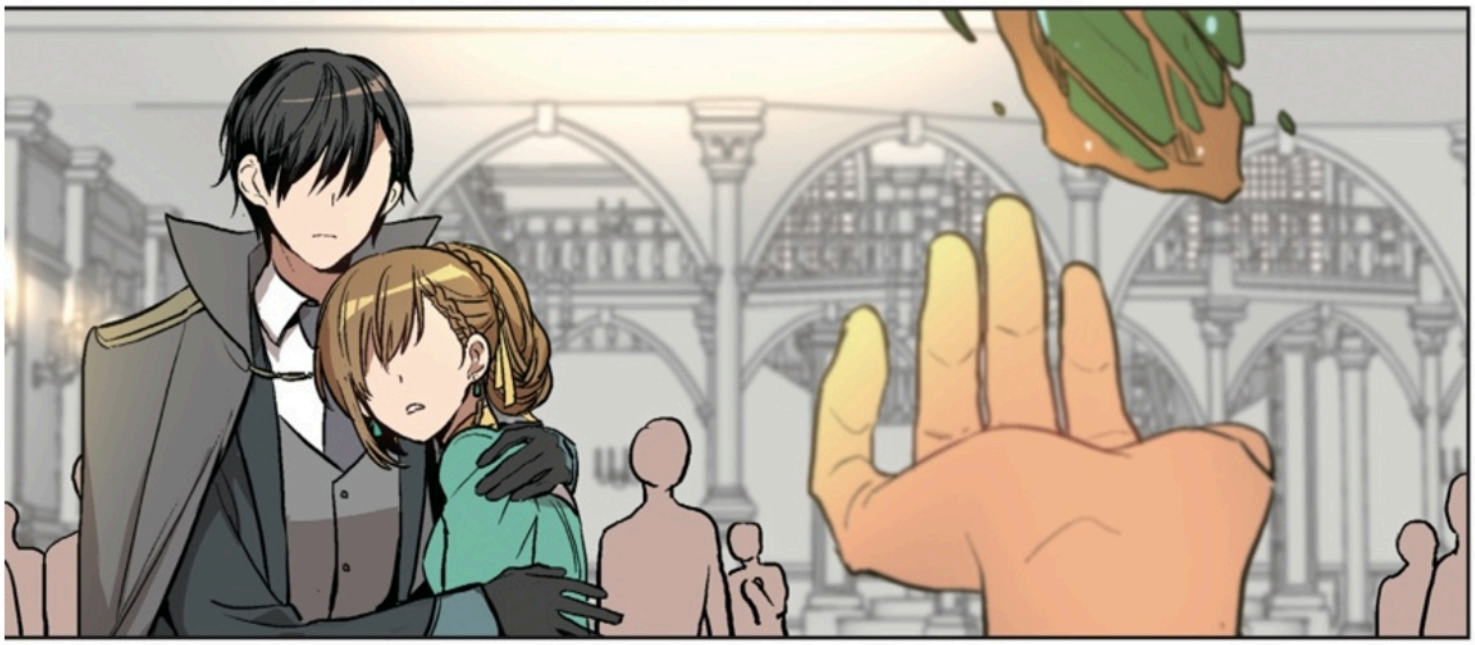
AH, DUKE WYNKNIGHT. DID YOU HAVE A GOOD TIME AFTER ABANDONING ME BACK THERE?
INDEED. I WAS QUITE AT EASE.
SNEAK
RAELIANA.
YEAH?
HEADING SOMEWHERE, ARE YOU?
UH... THE, UM, POWDER ROOM?

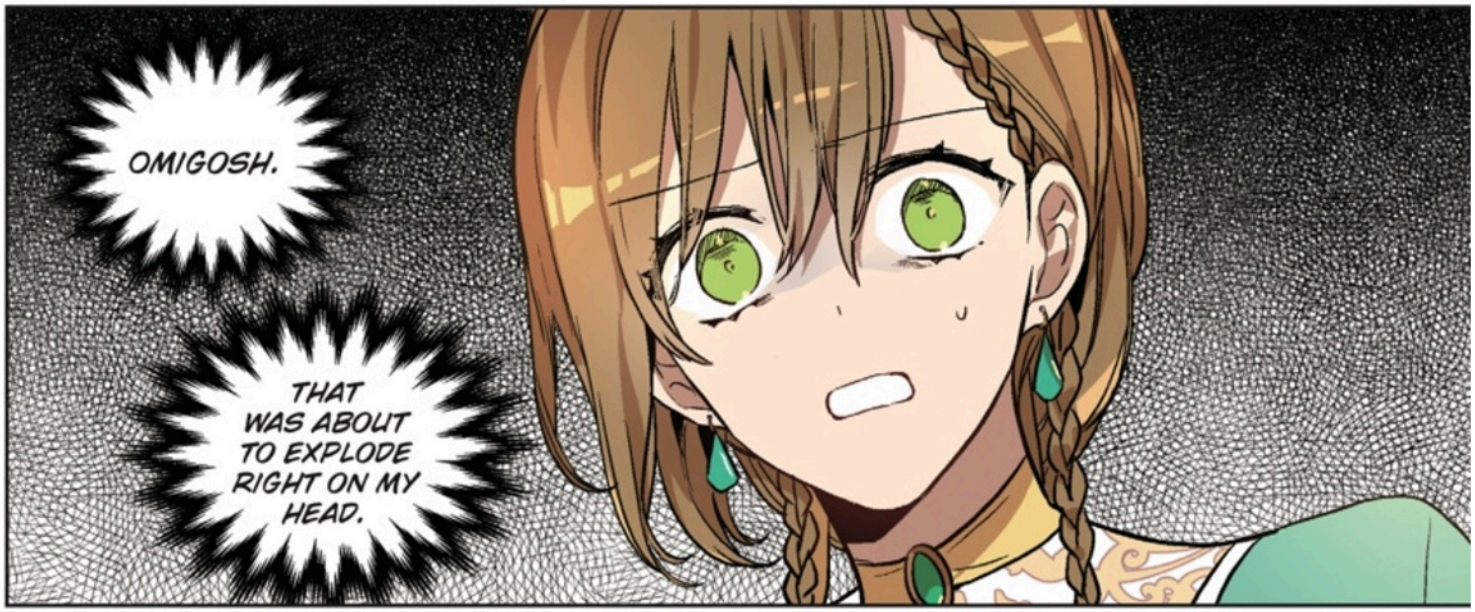

THEN COME THIS WAY.
TCH.
...RAELIANA, WHAT IS THAT?
EXCUSE ME?
KRK


...HUH?
KRK
KRIK
KRAK
...!!

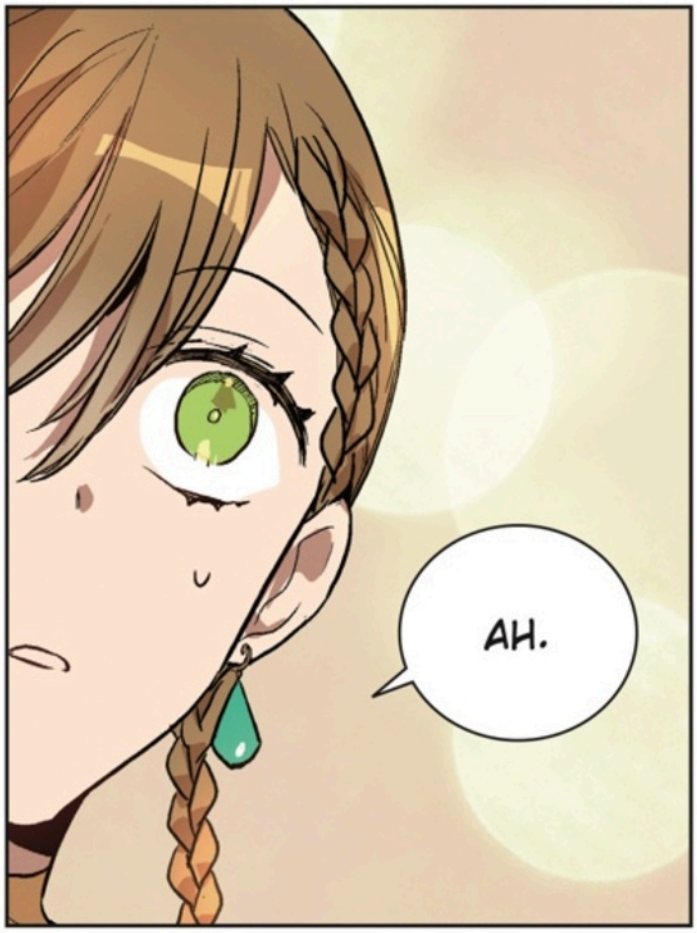

TINK
HOLD STILL.


PULL

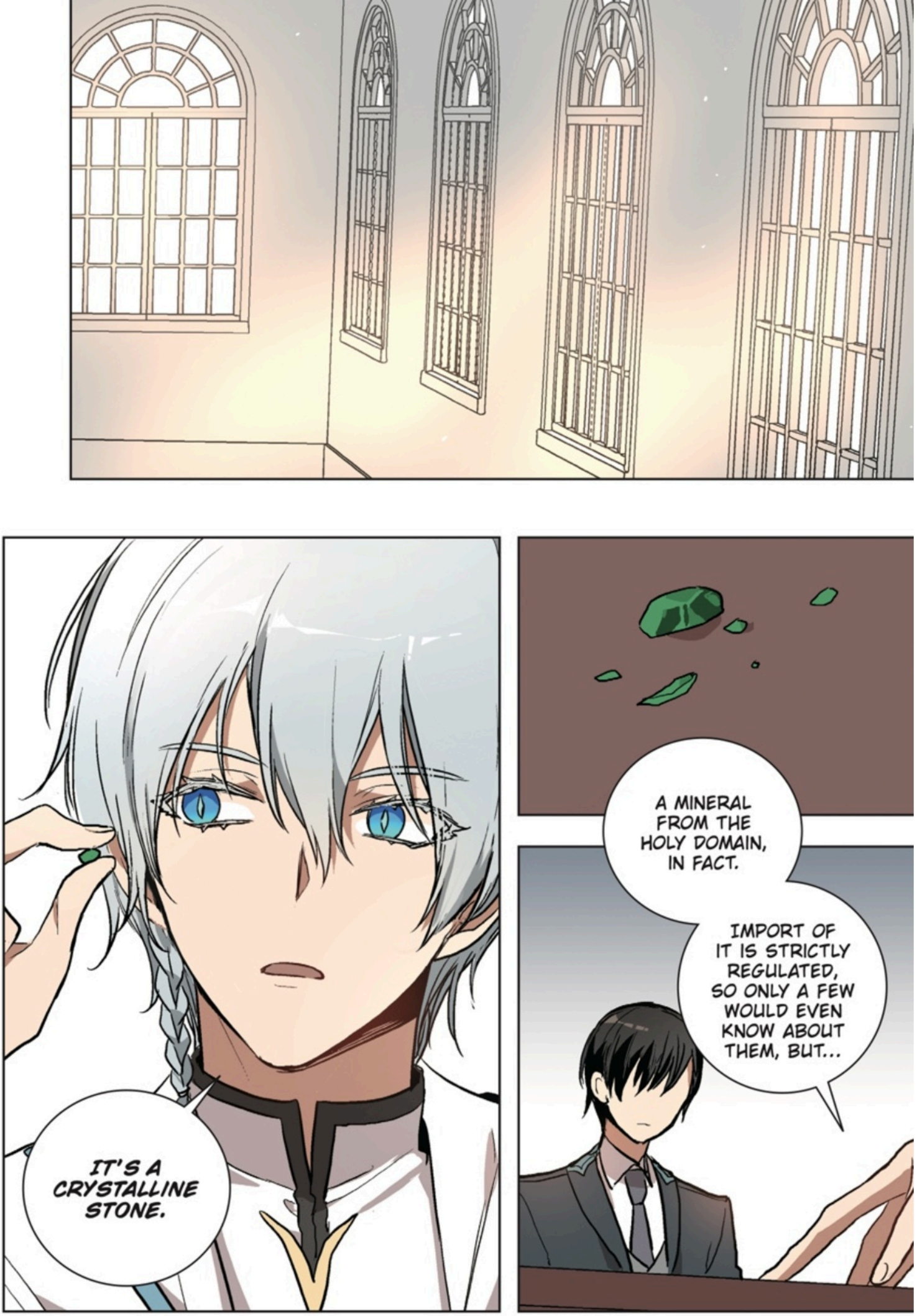



OMIGOSH.
THAT WAS ABOUT TO EXPLODE RIGHT ON MY HEAD.

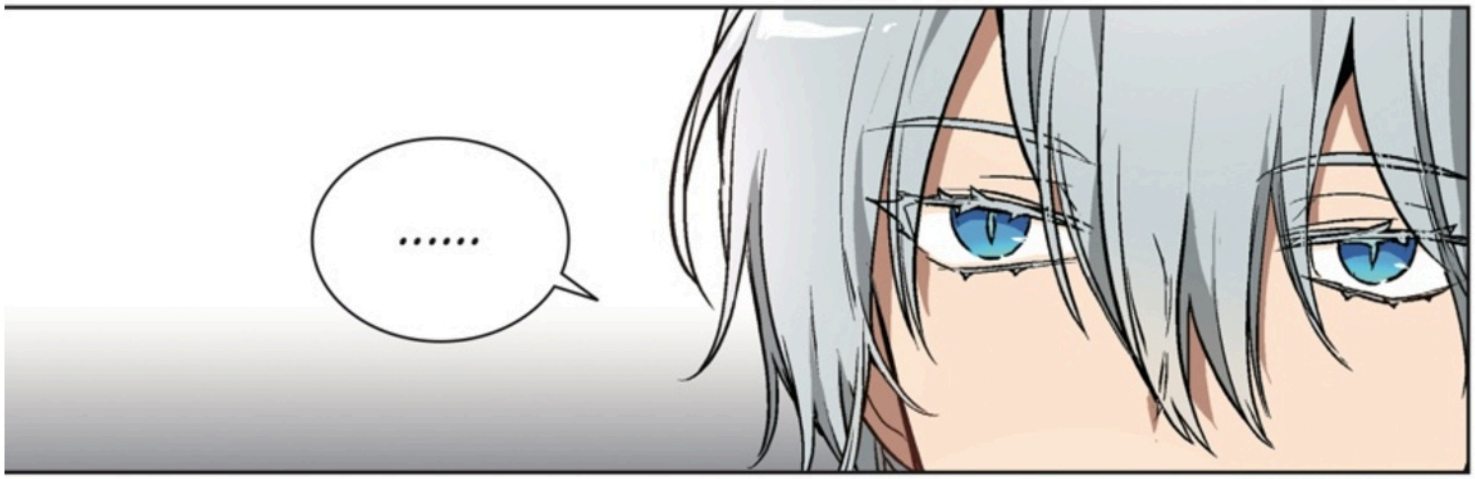
TMP


AH.

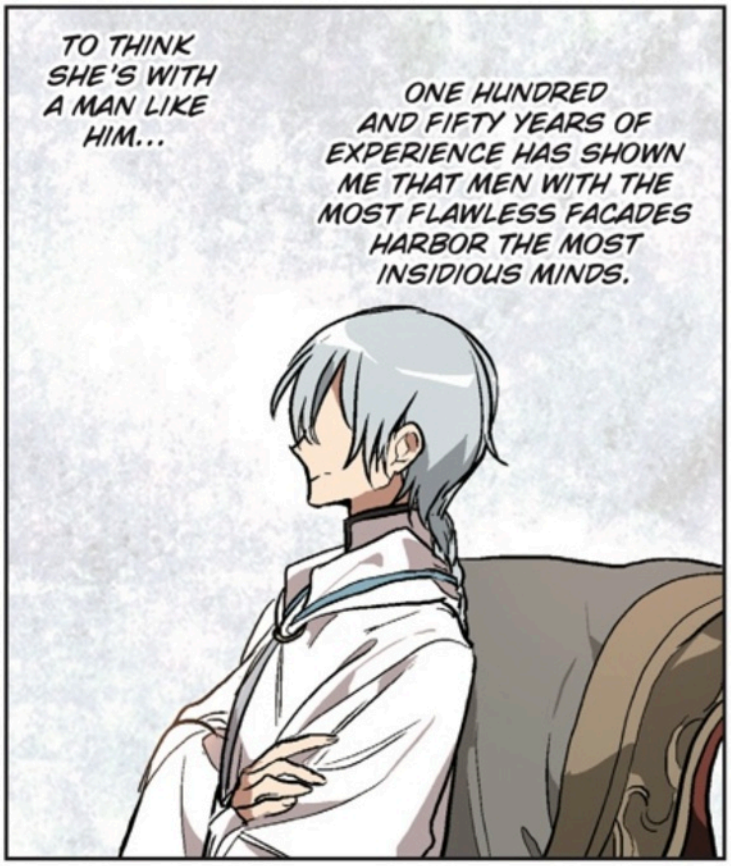
WILL YOU CALL ME GRANDPA NOW?

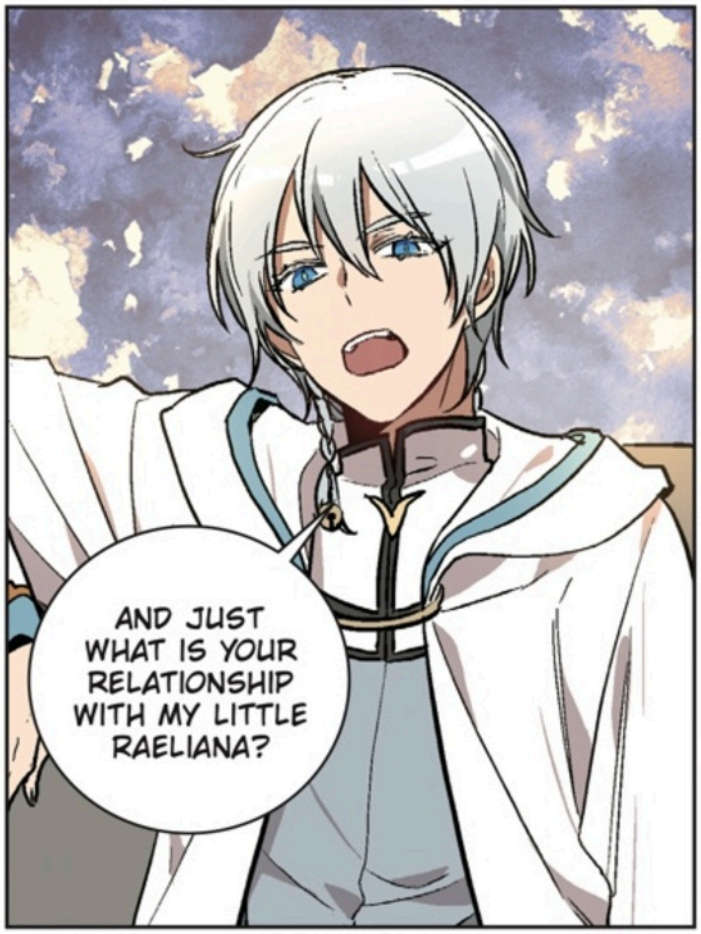

IT'S A CRYSTALLINE STONE.
A MINERAL FROM THE HOLY DOMAIN, IN FACT.
IMPORT OF IT IS STRICTLY REGULATED, SO ONLY A FEW WOULD EVEN KNOW ABOUT THEM, BUT...

...BEAUTIFUL AS THEY MAY BE, THESE JEWELS ABSORB LIGHT UNTIL THEY REACH A LIMIT, AT WHICH POINT THEY VIOLENTLY EXPLODE.


.....

HE HAS THE EYES OF A SAVAGE BEAST.

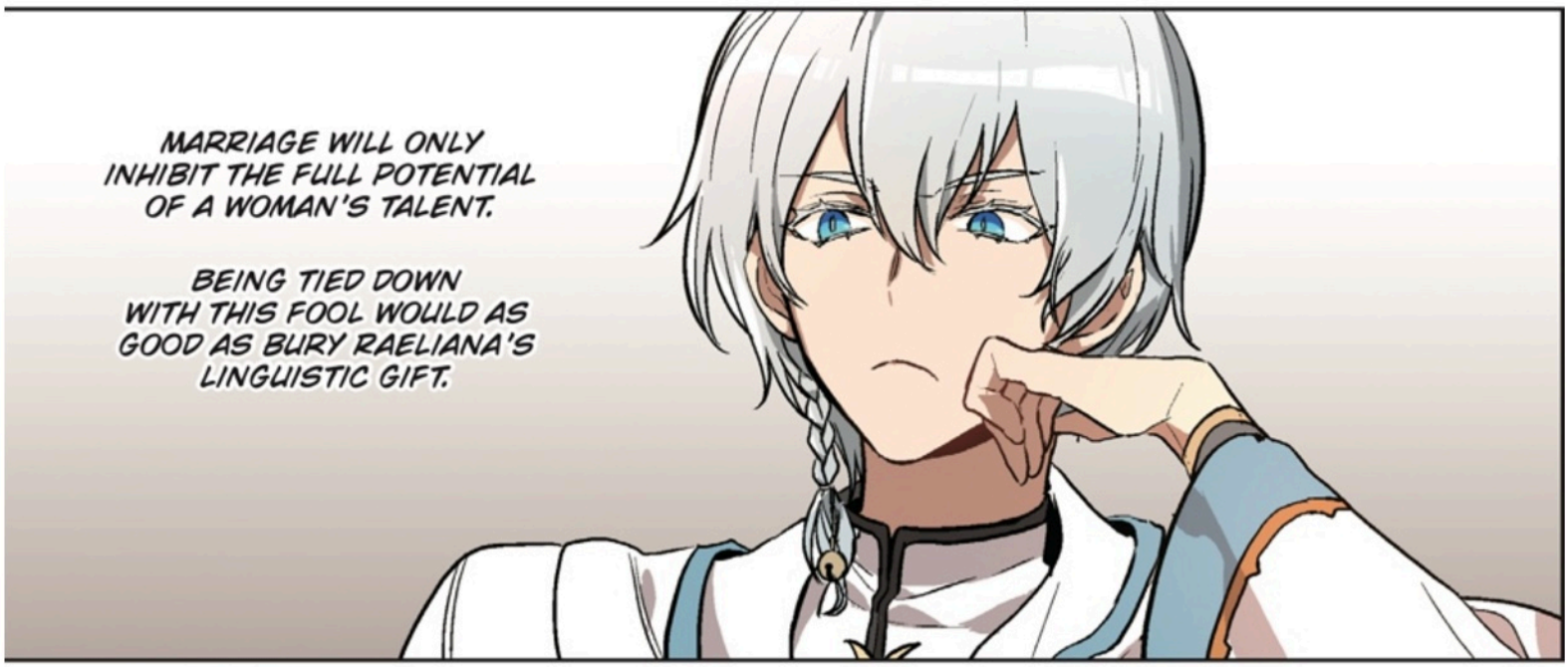

TO THINK SHE'S WITH A MAN LIKE HIM...
ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE HAS SHOWN ME THAT MEN WITH THE MOST FLAWLESS FACADES HARBOR THE MOST INSIDIOUS MINDS.


AND JUST WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH MY LITTLE RAELIANA?

YOUR... LITTLE... RAELIANA?

YOU HAVE A PROBLEM WITH HOW I ADDRESS HER?

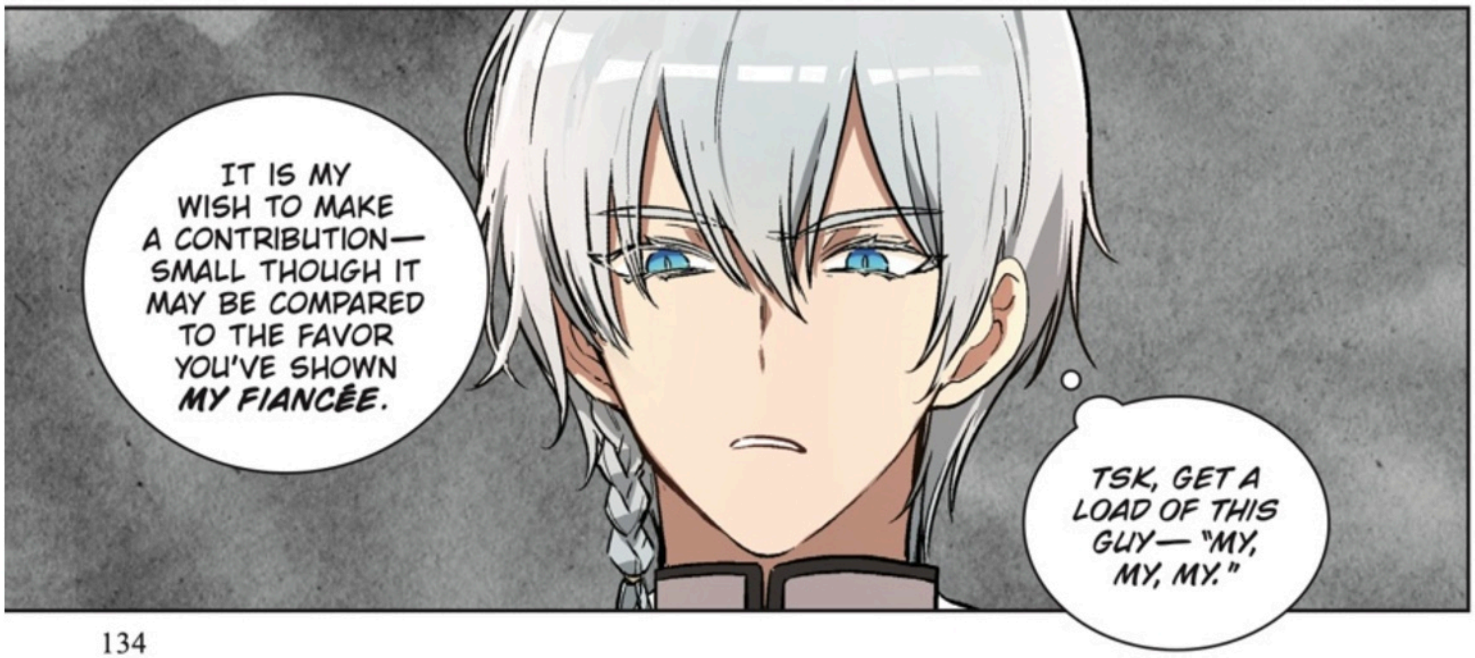
I'M HER FIANCÉ.


MARRIAGE WILL ONLY INHIBIT THE FULL POTENTIAL OF A WOMAN'S TALENT.
BEING TIED DOWN WITH THIS FOOL WOULD AS GOOD AS BURY RAELIANA'S LINGUISTIC GIFT.

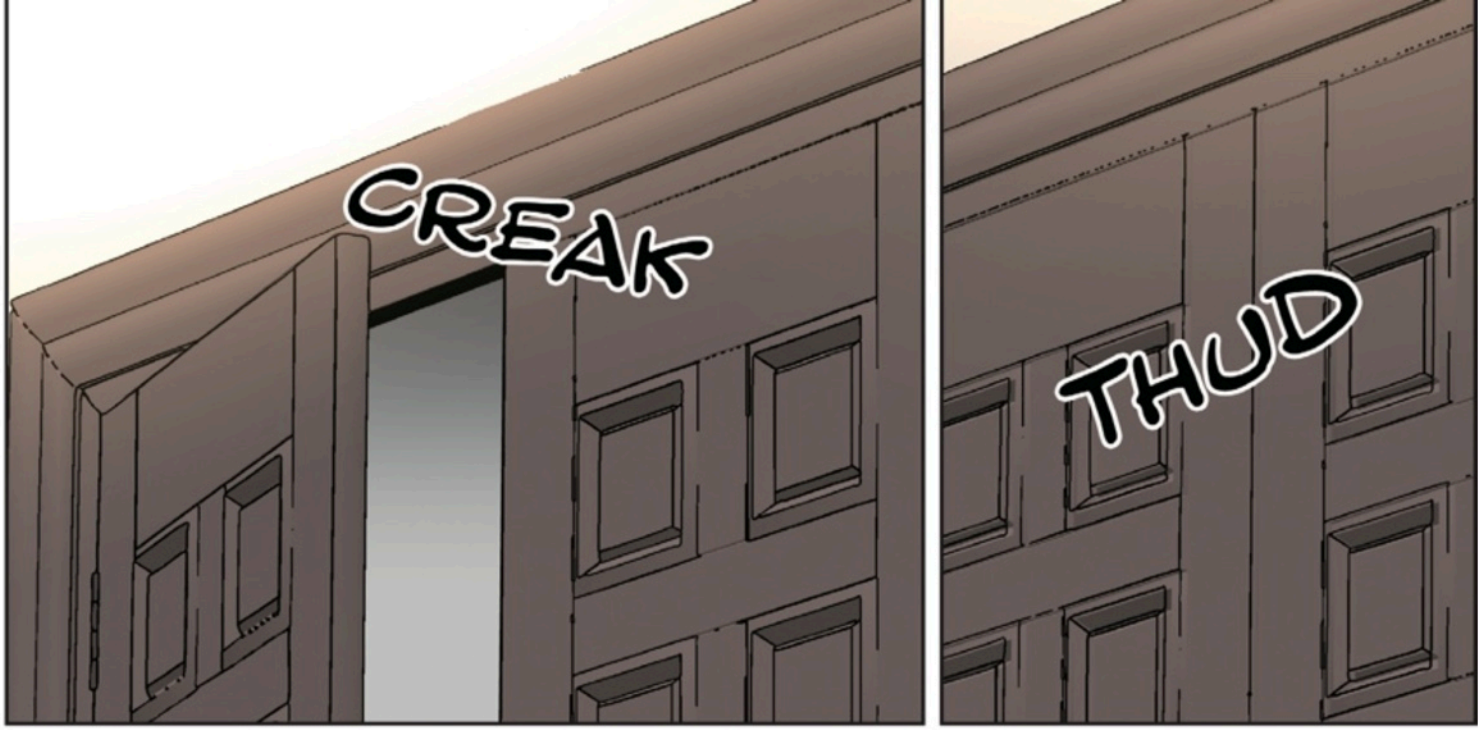
YOU MAY THINK YOU'RE FOOLING EVERYONE, BUT I CAN READ IN YOUR EYES YOUR OWN SELF-RUIN. YOU'D BEST BREAK UP WITH MY RAELIANA.
THE OLD CRANK IS CURSING PEOPLE AGAIN!

IS THAT SO?

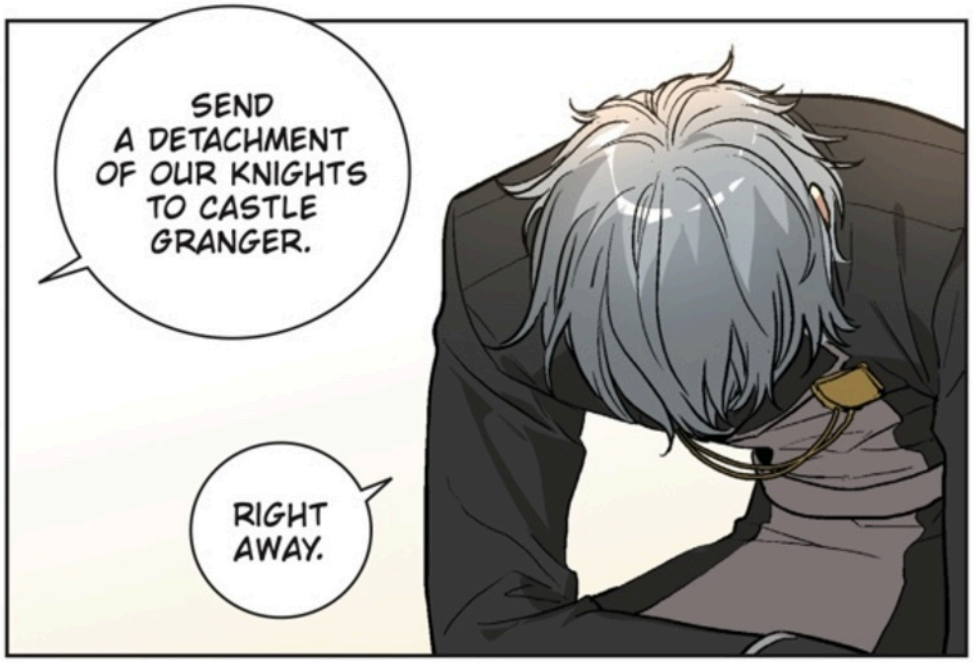
I'M TRULY GRATEFUL, YOUR HOLINESS, THAT YOU SAVED MY FIANCÉE. I'VE HEARD THAT THE ORDER'S FUNDS HAVE BEEN STRETCHED THIN AS OF LATE.


IT IS MY WISH TO MAKE A CONTRIBUTION— SMALL THOUGH IT MAY BE COMPARED TO THE FAVOR YOU'VE SHOWN MY FIANCÉE.
TSK, GET A LOAD OF THIS GUY— "MY, MY, MY."

NO NEED TO CONCERN YOURSELF WITH WHAT I DID ON BEHALF OF MY GRANDDAUGHTER.
IN FACT, YOU SHOULD STOP CONCERNING YOURSELF WITH HER ENTIRELY. FOREVER.
I COULDN'T POSSIBLY DO THAT. SHE'S MY FIANCÉE, AFTER ALL, WHICH MAKES ME RESPONSIBLE FOR HER.
RAELIANA WILL BE WELL LOOKED AFTER. BY ME.
KRAK
ALLOW ME...
...TO TALK YOU THROUGH THE DONATION PROCESS, DUKE WYNKNIGHT.


CREAK
THUD

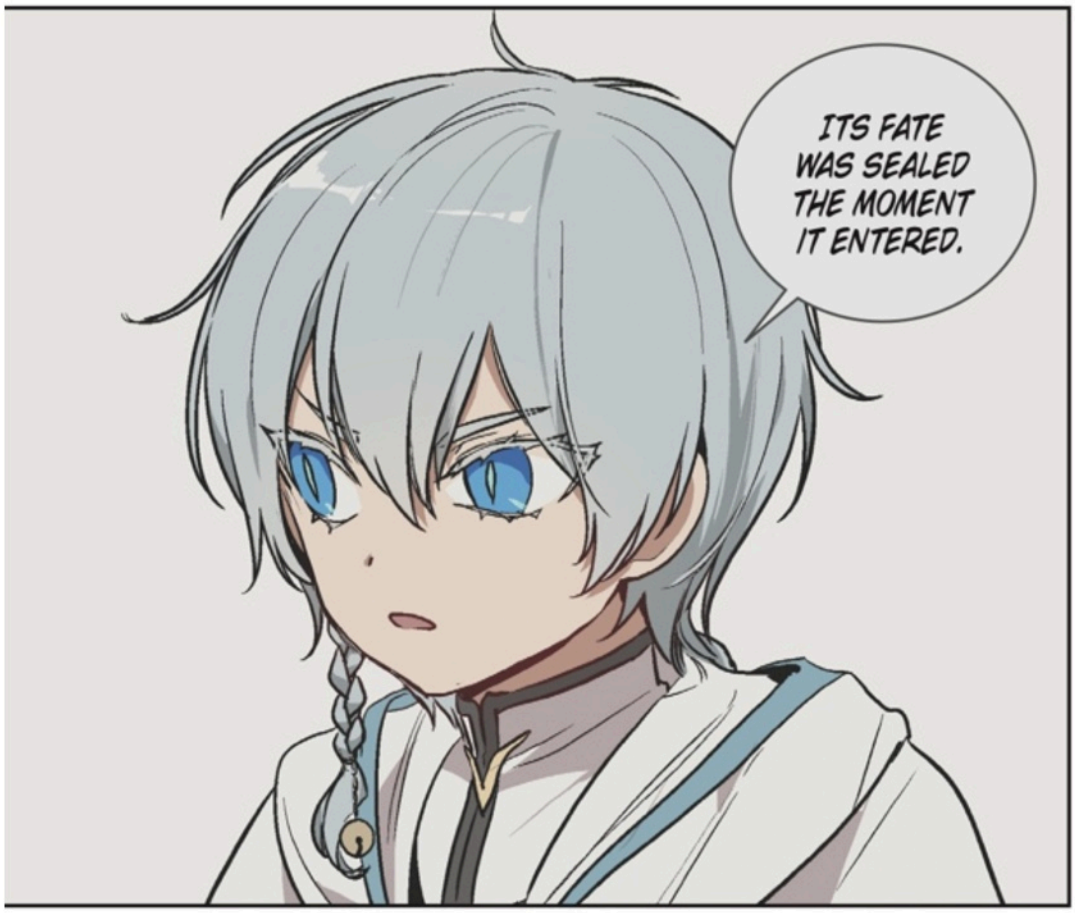
ADAM.


SEND A DETACHMENT OF OUR KNIGHTS TO CASTLE GRANGER.
RIGHT AWAY.

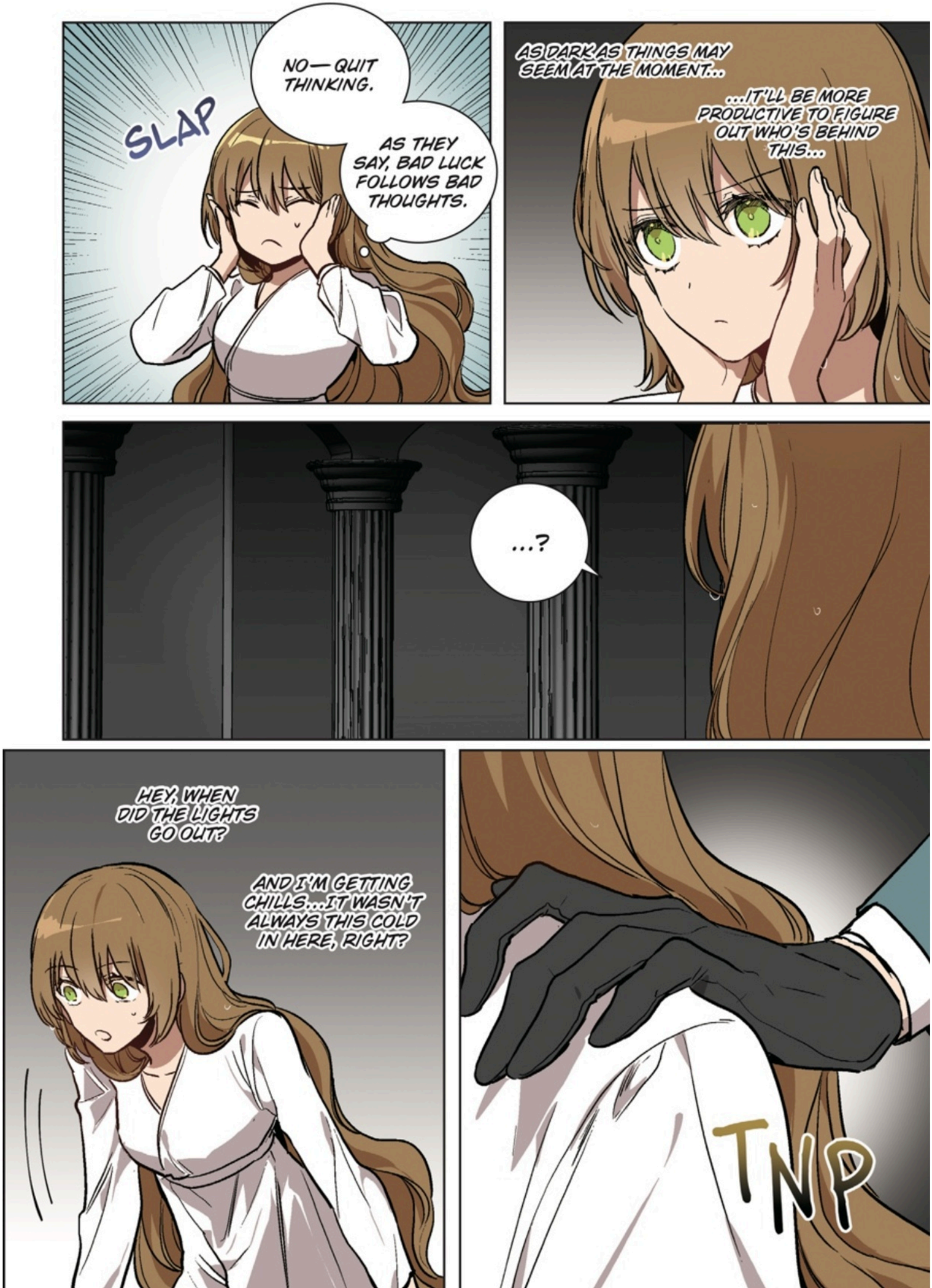
SHF

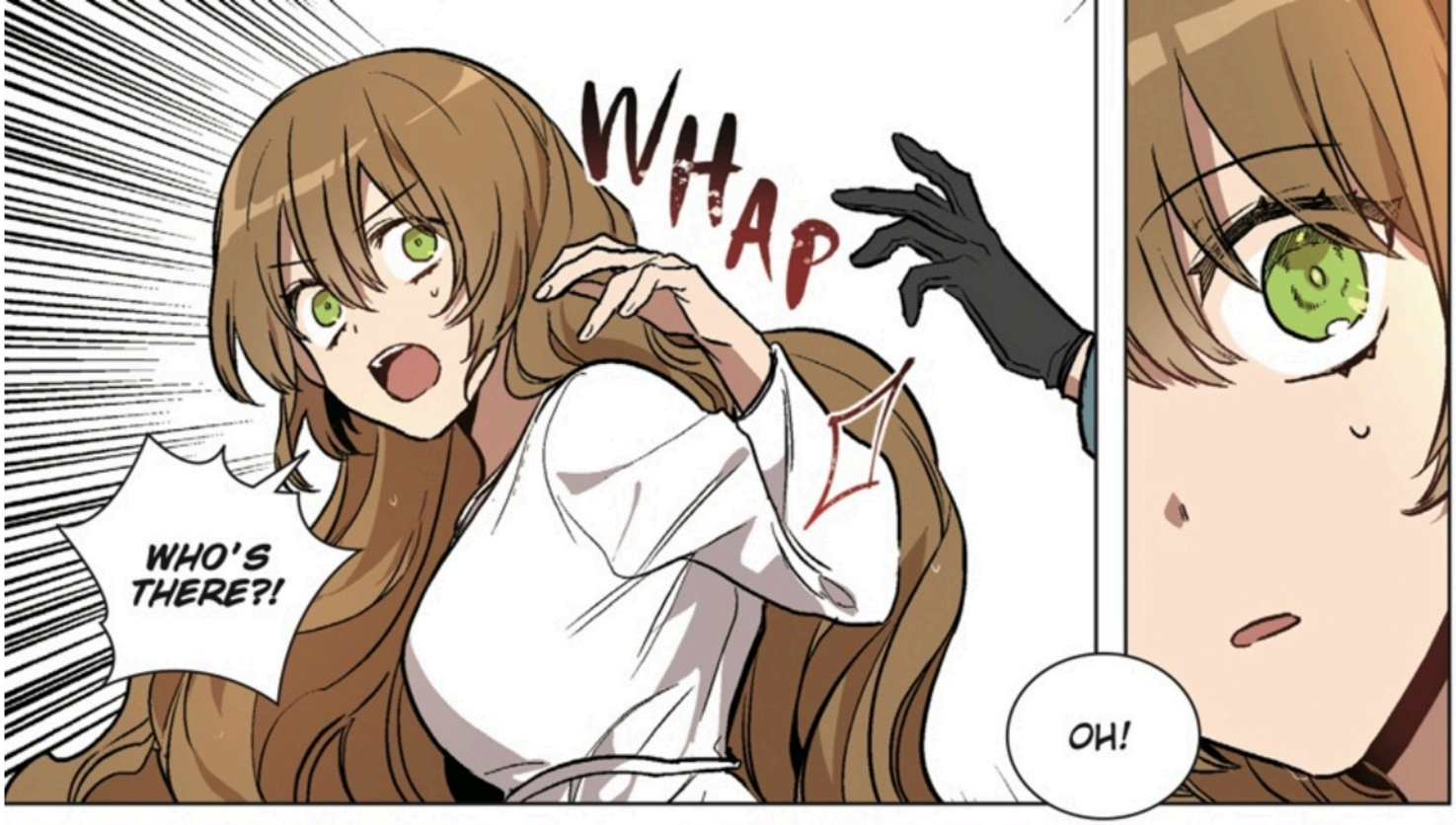
O
PLIP

IF IT'D BEEN A SECOND LATER... NO, IF HEIKA HADN'T BEEN THERE...


ITS FATE WAS SEALED THE MOMENT IT ENTERED.

IN THE END, IS RAELIANA McMILLAN... THE SIDE CHARACTER... THE EXTRA...
...REALLY DESTINED TO DIE?

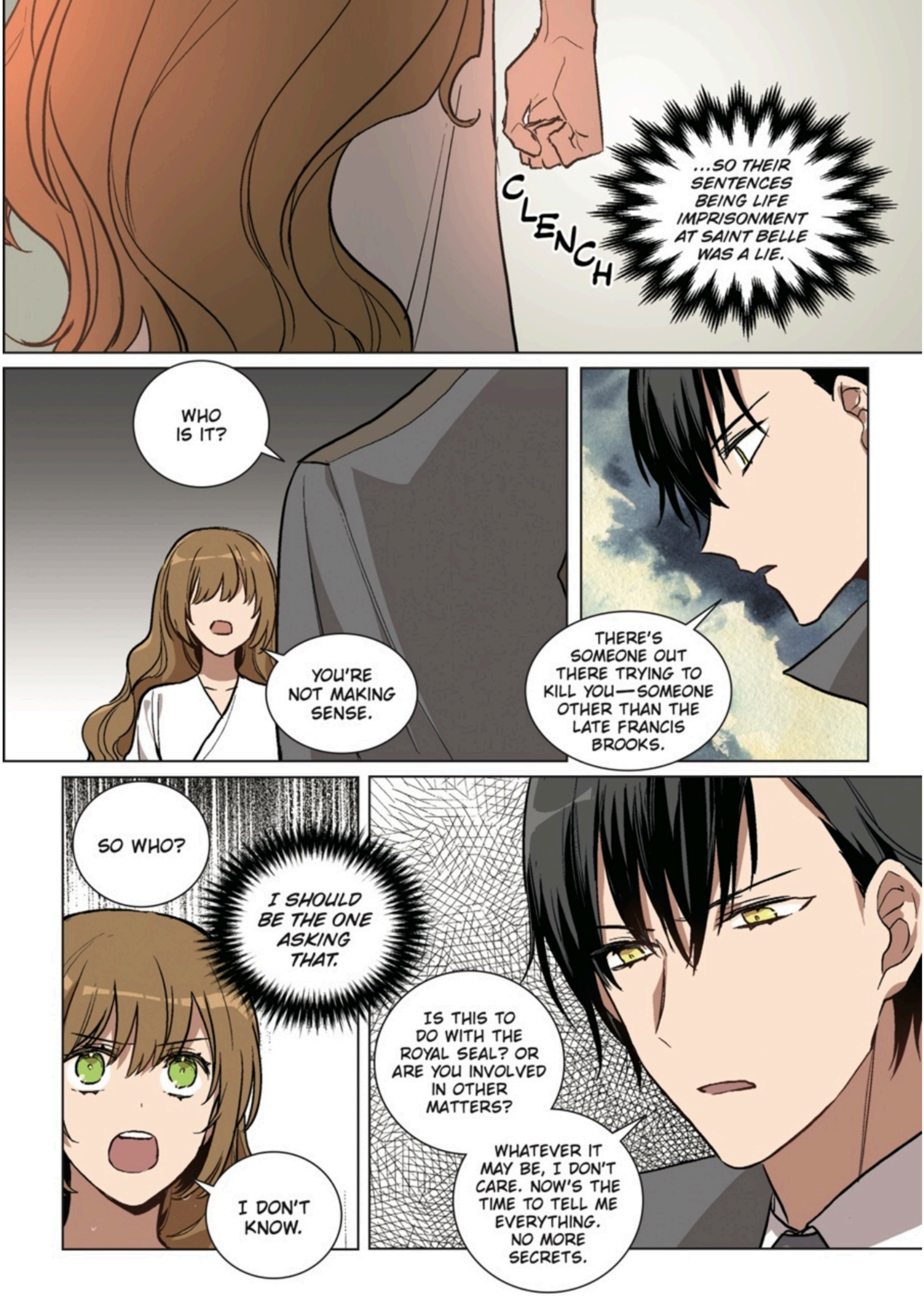

SLAP
NO—QUIT THINKING.
AS THEY SAY, BAD LUCK FOLLOWS BAD THOUGHTS.
AS DARK AS THINGS MAY SEEM AT THE MOMENT...
...IT'LL BE MORE PRODUCTIVE TO FIGURE OUT WHO'S BEHIND THIS...
...?
HEY, WHEN DID THE LIGHTS GO OUT?
AND I'M GETTING CHILLS...IT WASN'T ALWAYS THIS COLD IN HERE, RIGHT?
TNP

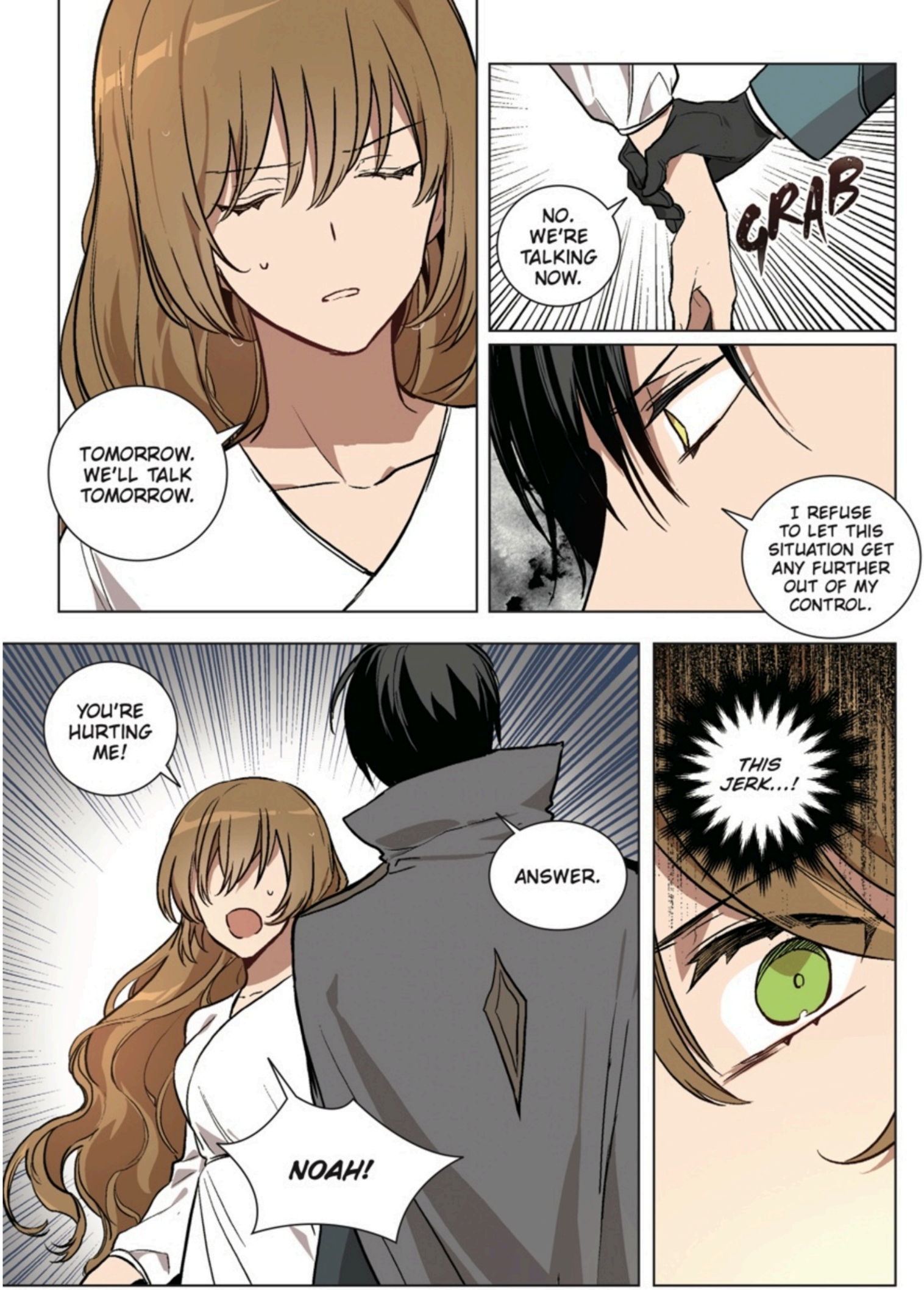

WHAP
WHO'S THERE?!
OH!

YOU SCARED ME.
RAELIANA.

YOU WERE IN REAL DANGER TODAY.
NOAH, IT ISN'T APPROPRIATE FOR YOU TO BE HERE RIGHT NOW.

FRANCIS BROOKS AND JAKE LANGSTON ARE DEAD.
.....!!

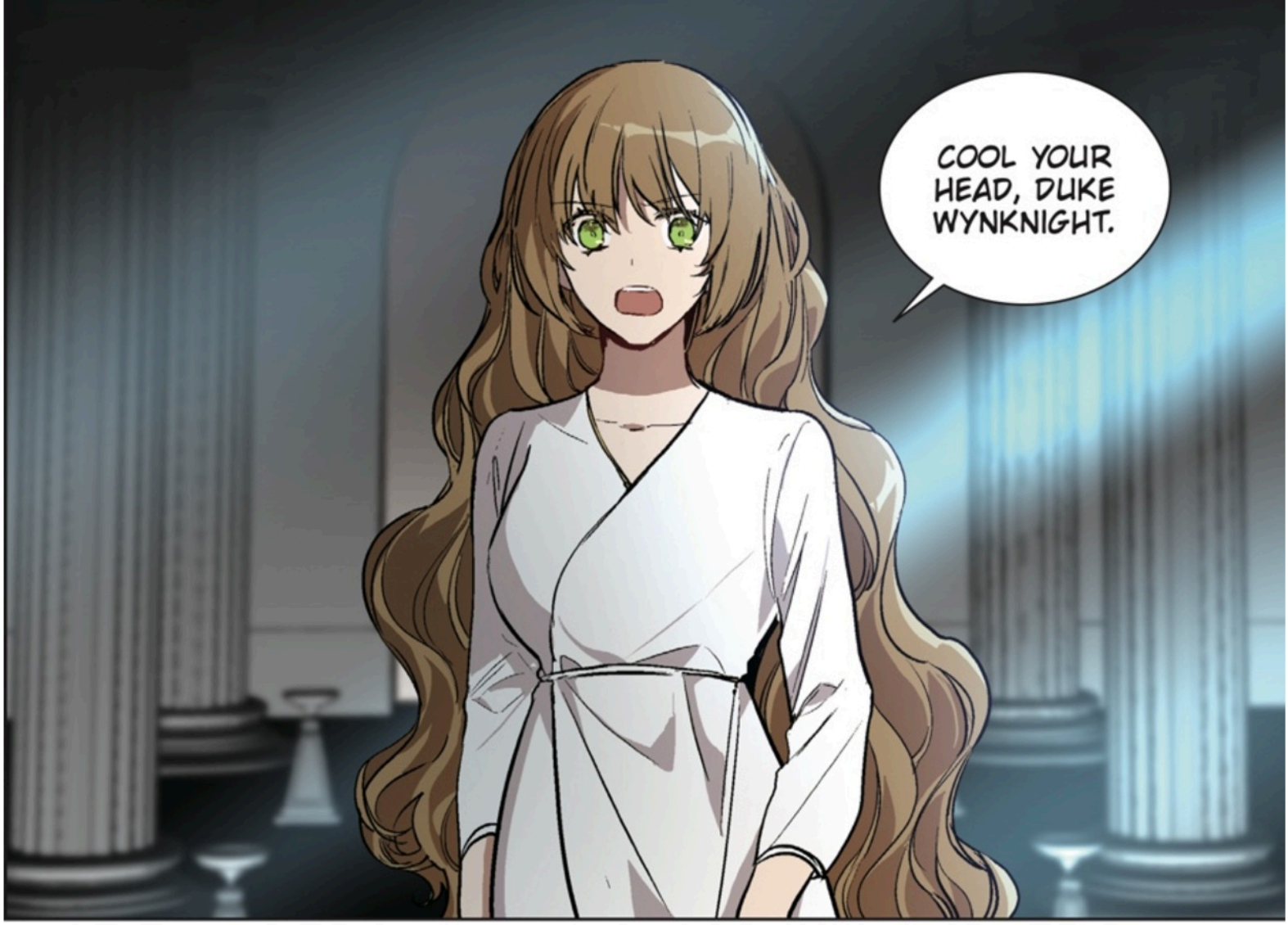

CLENCH
...SO THEIR SENTENCES BEING LIFE IMPRISONMENT AT SAINT BELLE WAS A LIE.
WHO IS IT?
YOU'RE NOT MAKING SENSE.
THERE'S SOMEONE OUT THERE TRYING TO KILL YOU—SOMEONE OTHER THAN THE LATE FRANCIS BROOKS.
SO WHO?
I SHOULD BE THE ONE ASKING THAT.
I DON'T KNOW.
IS THIS TO DO WITH THE ROYAL SEAL? OR ARE YOU INVOLVED IN OTHER MATTERS?
WHATEVER IT MAY BE, I DON'T CARE. NOW'S THE TIME TO TELL ME EVERYTHING. NO MORE SECRETS.


TOMORROW. WE'LL TALK TOMORROW.
NO. WE'RE TALKING NOW.
GRAB
I REFUSE TO LET THIS SITUATION GET ANY FURTHER OUT OF MY CONTROL.
YOU'RE HURTING ME!
ANSWER.
NOAH!
THIS JERK...!

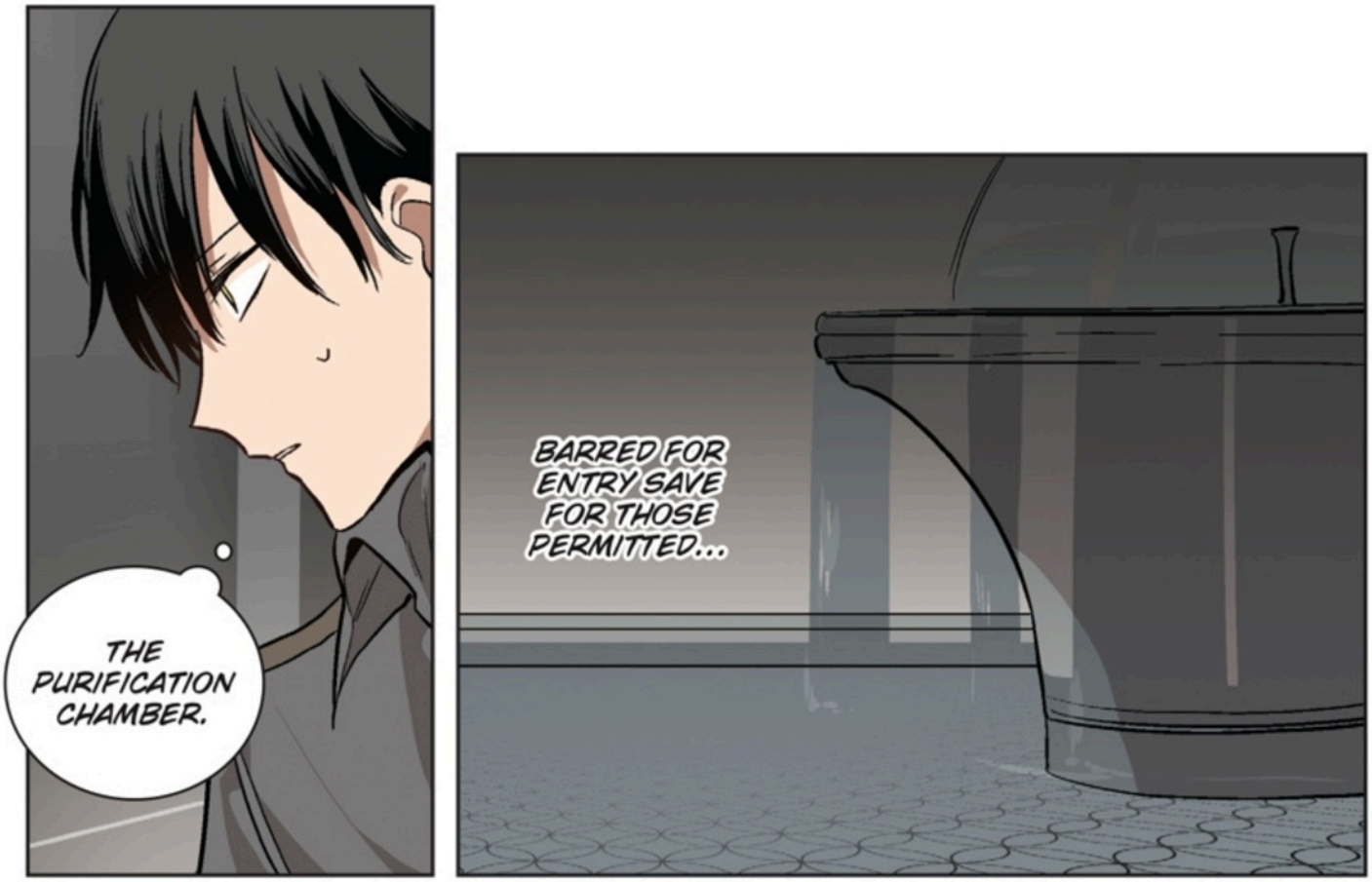
PULL

WHISH

SPLOOSH

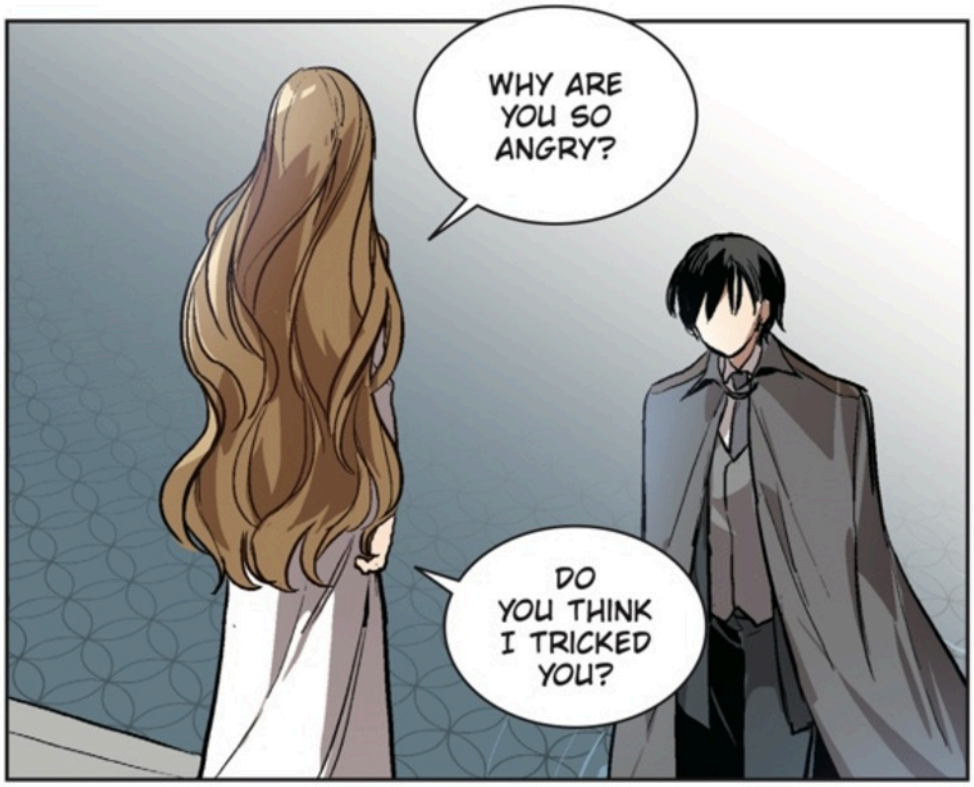

COOL YOUR HEAD, DUKE WYNKNIGHT.

DO YOU EVEN KNOW WHERE WE ARE RIGHT NOW?


THE PURIFICATION CHAMBER.
BARRED FOR ENTRY SAVE FOR THOSE PERMITTED...

WHERE HAS MY SELF-RESTRAINT GONE...?

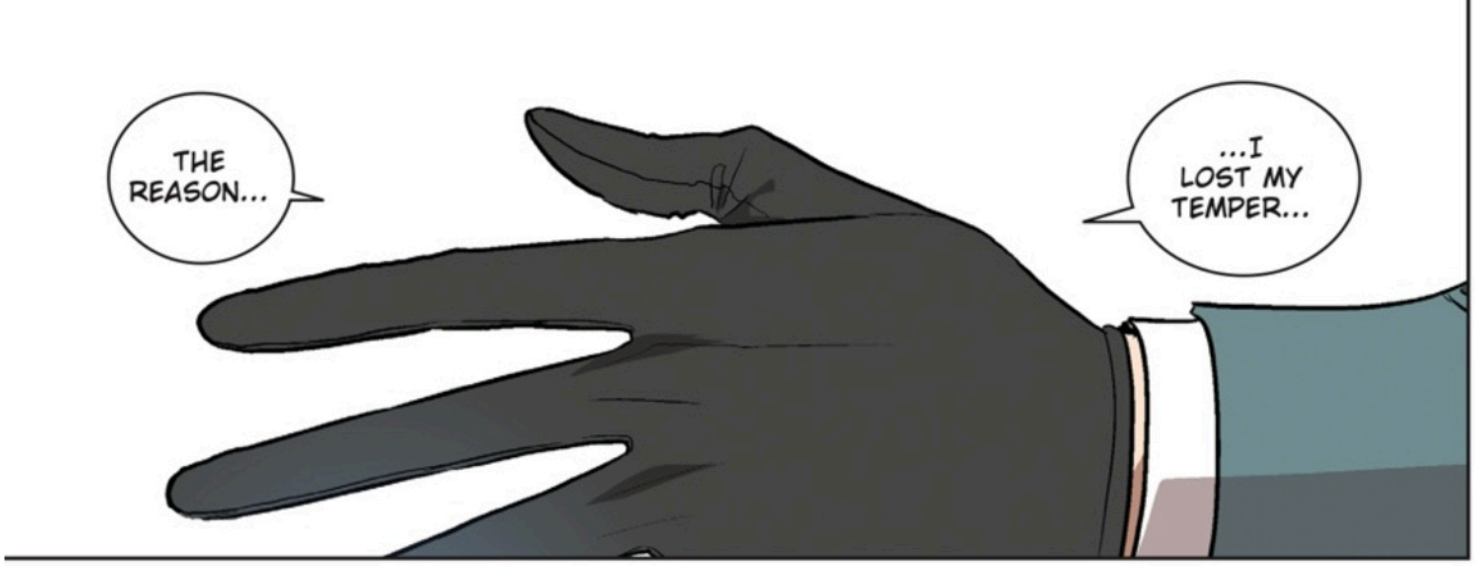
THE WAY YOU ACT TOWARD LADY McMILLAN...
...IS IT SINCERE?

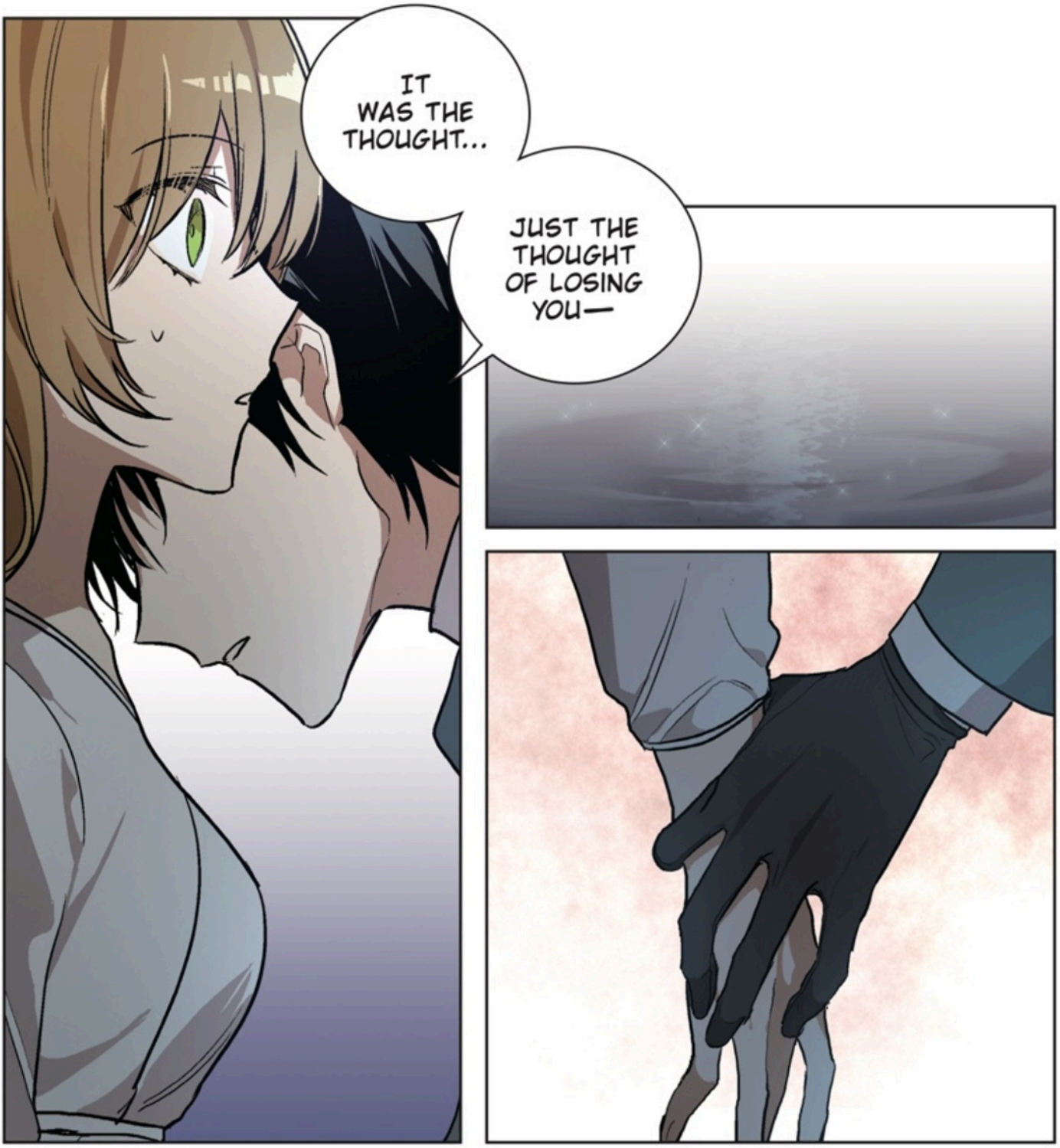

WHY ARE YOU SO ANGRY?
DO YOU THINK I TRICKED YOU?

IT ISN'T UNREASONABLE FOR NOAH TO MISTRUST ME.
THE ONLY THING THAT EVER BOUND US TOGETHER WAS A CONTRACT.

SO WHY DO I FEEL THIS ANNOYED...?

RAELIANA.

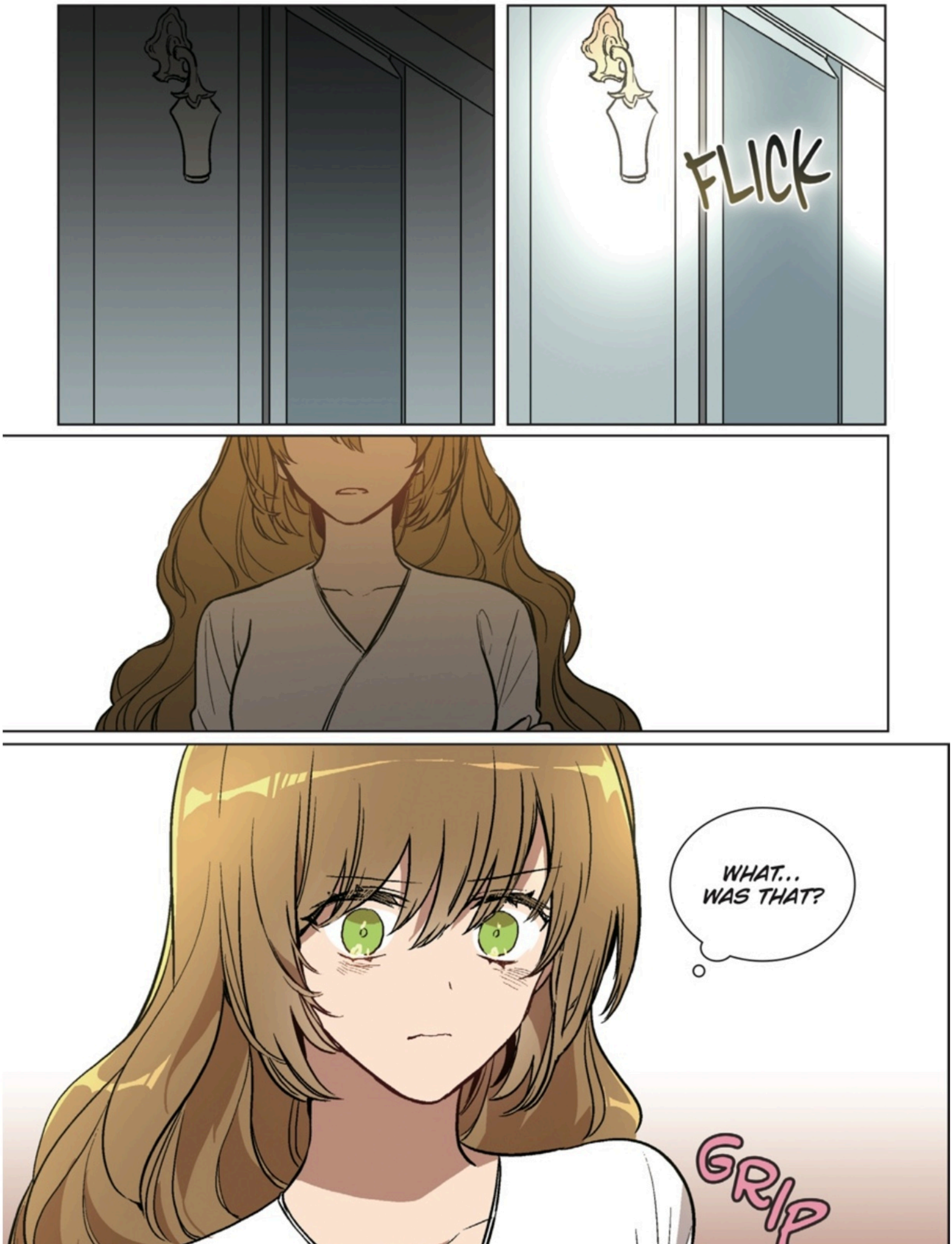

THE REASON...
...I LOST MY TEMPER...


IT WAS THE THOUGHT...
JUST THE THOUGHT OF LOSING YOU—

IT DROVE ME MAD.

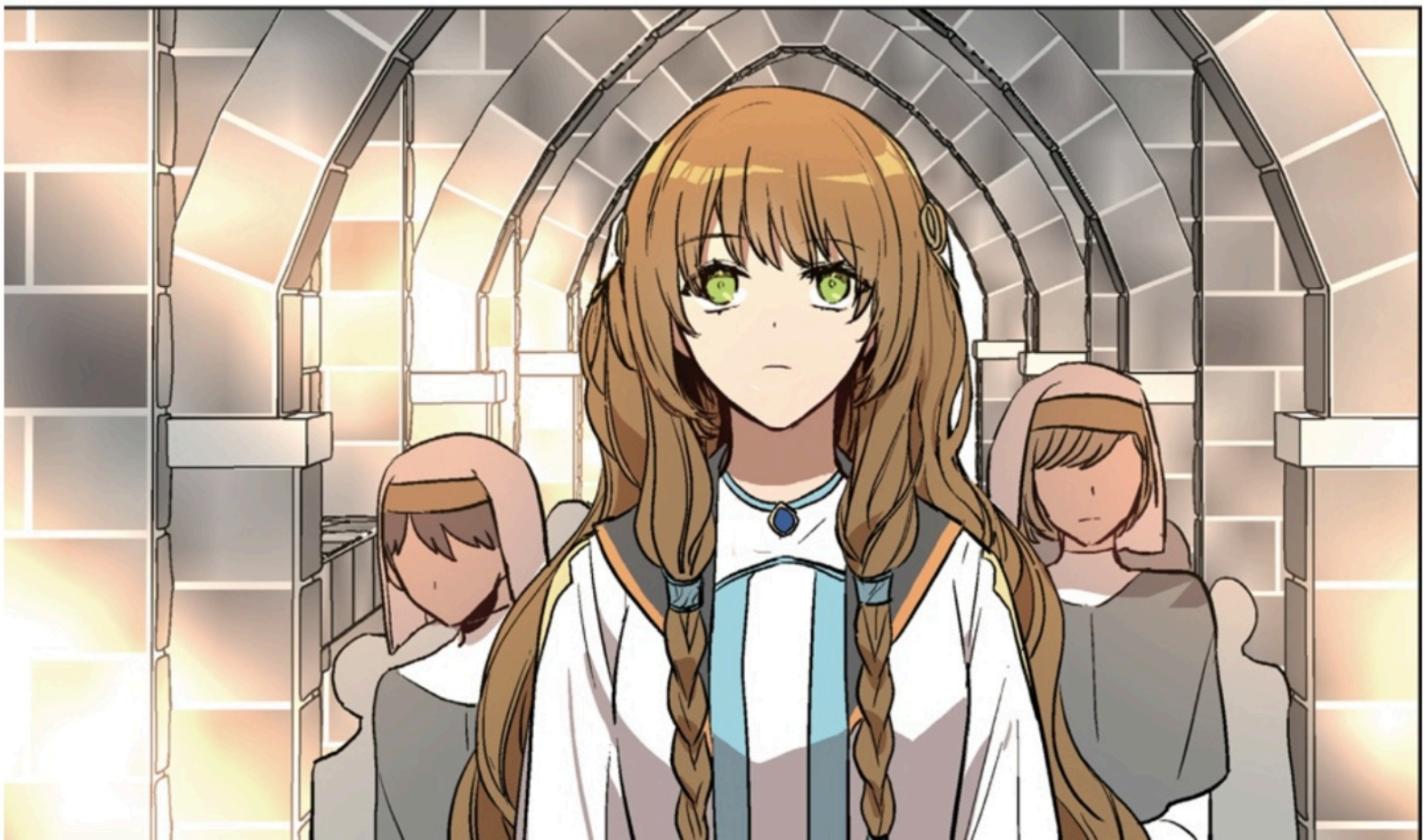
WHAT ARE YOU...?

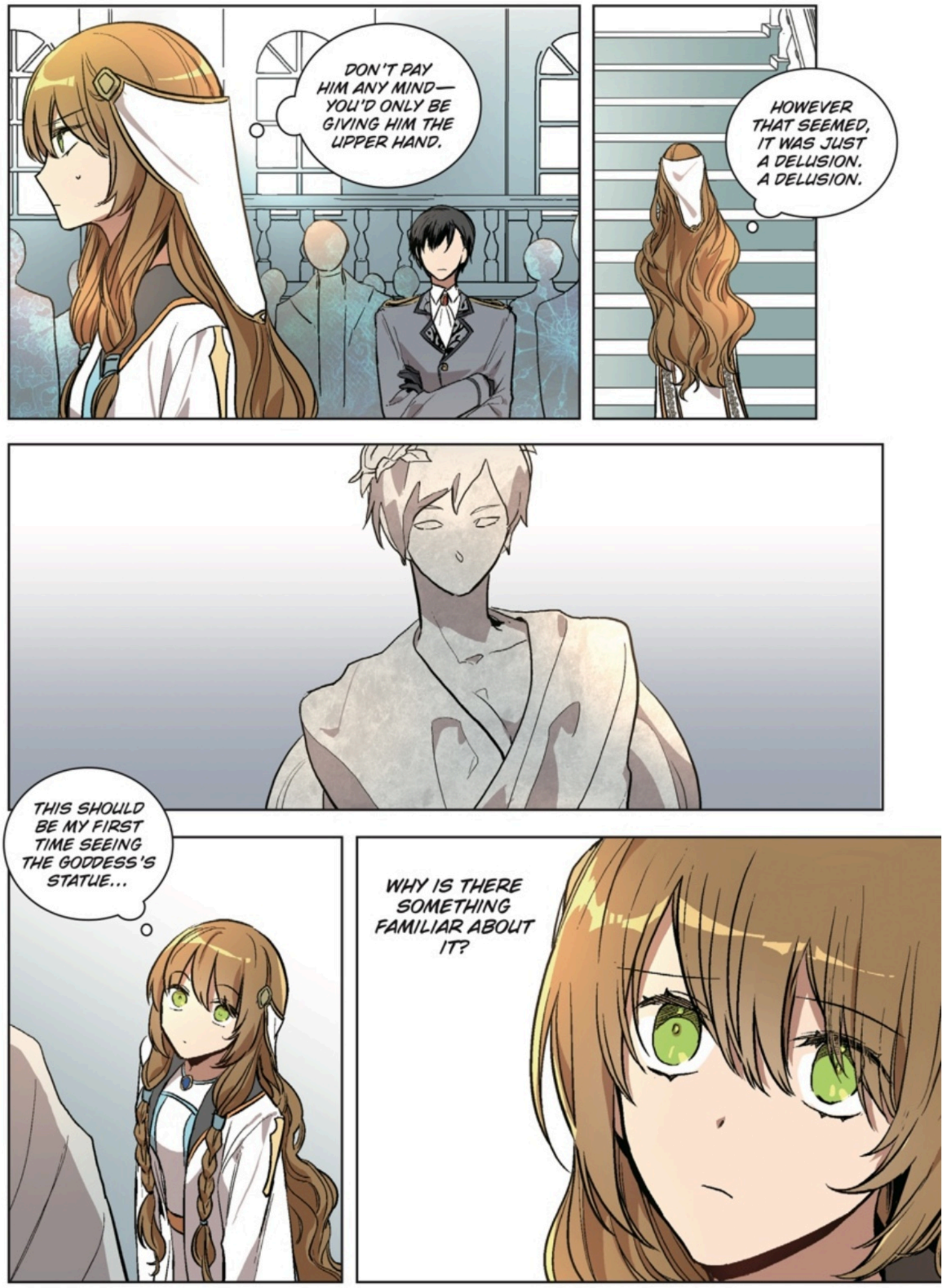
GET SOME REST, RAELIANA.

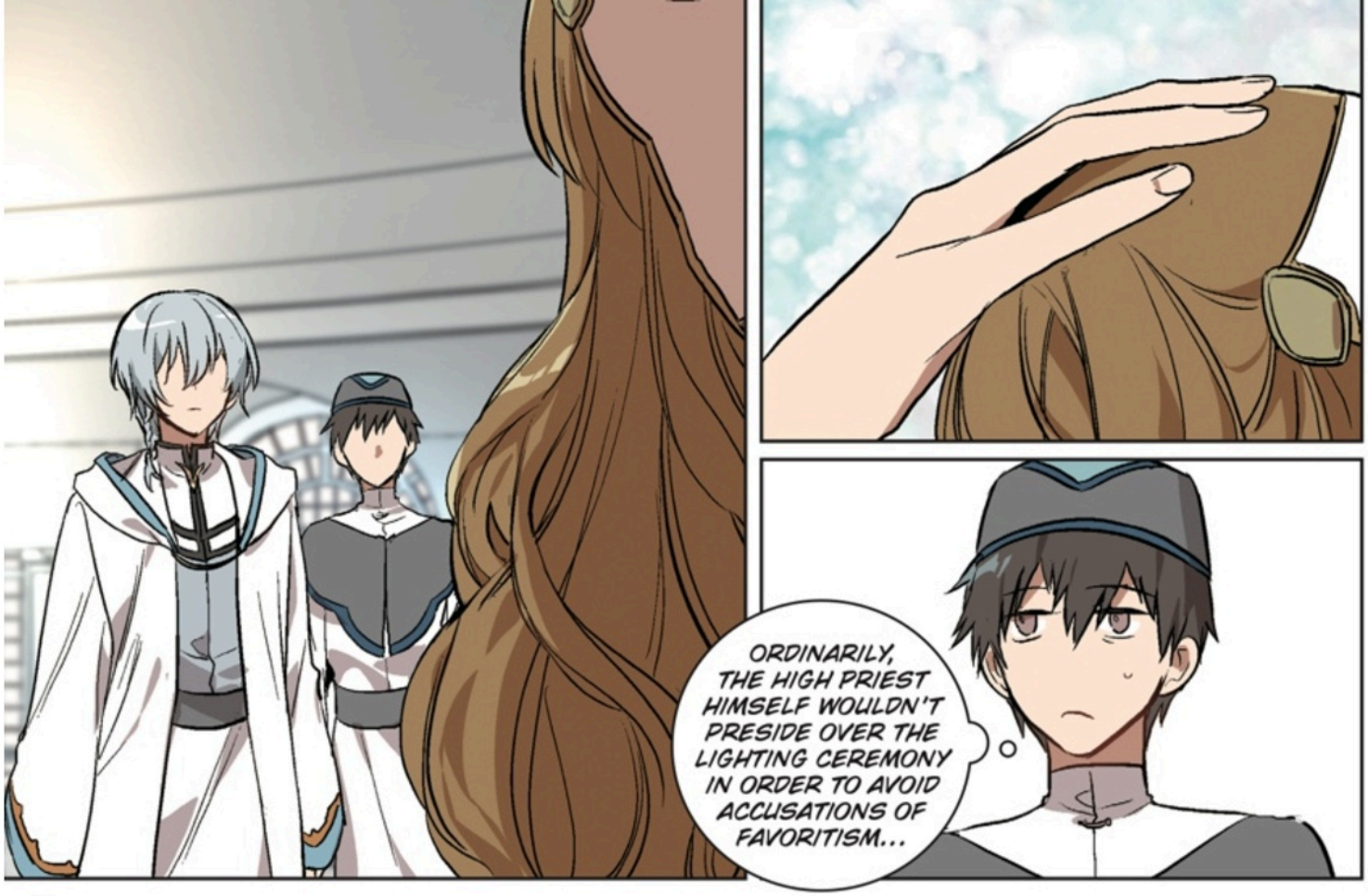

FLICK
WHAT... WAS THAT?
GRIP

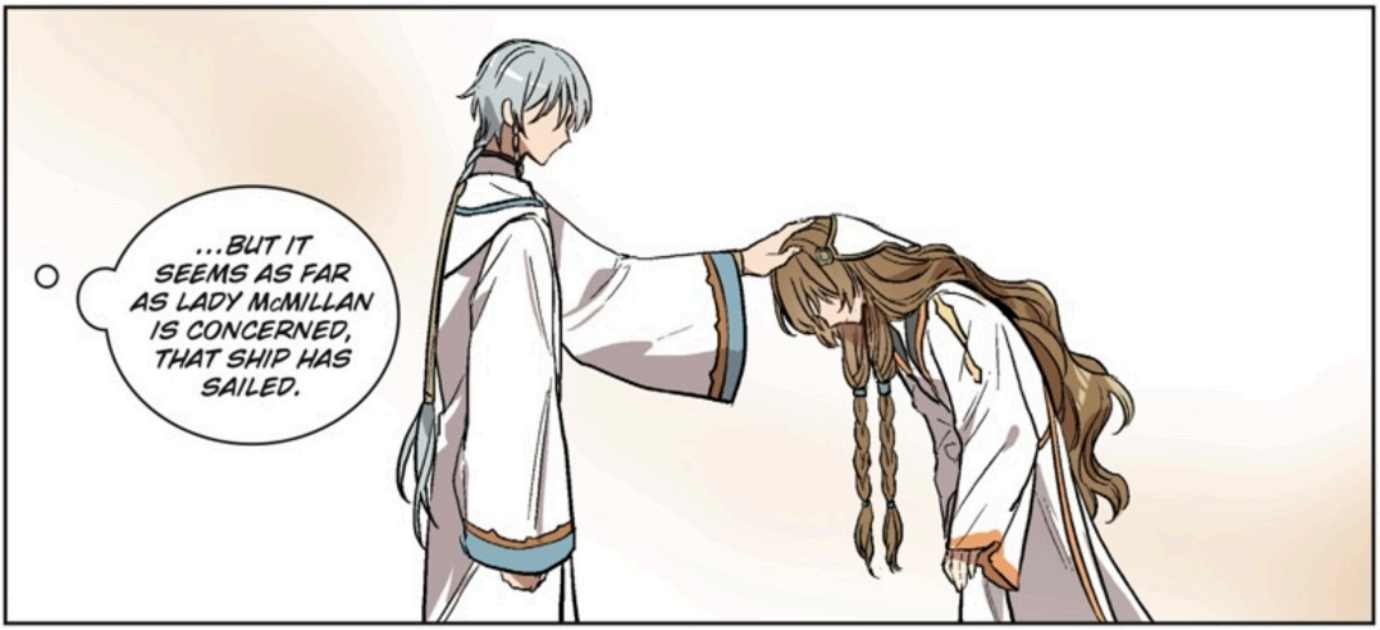
Why Raeliana Ended Up at the Duke's Mansion

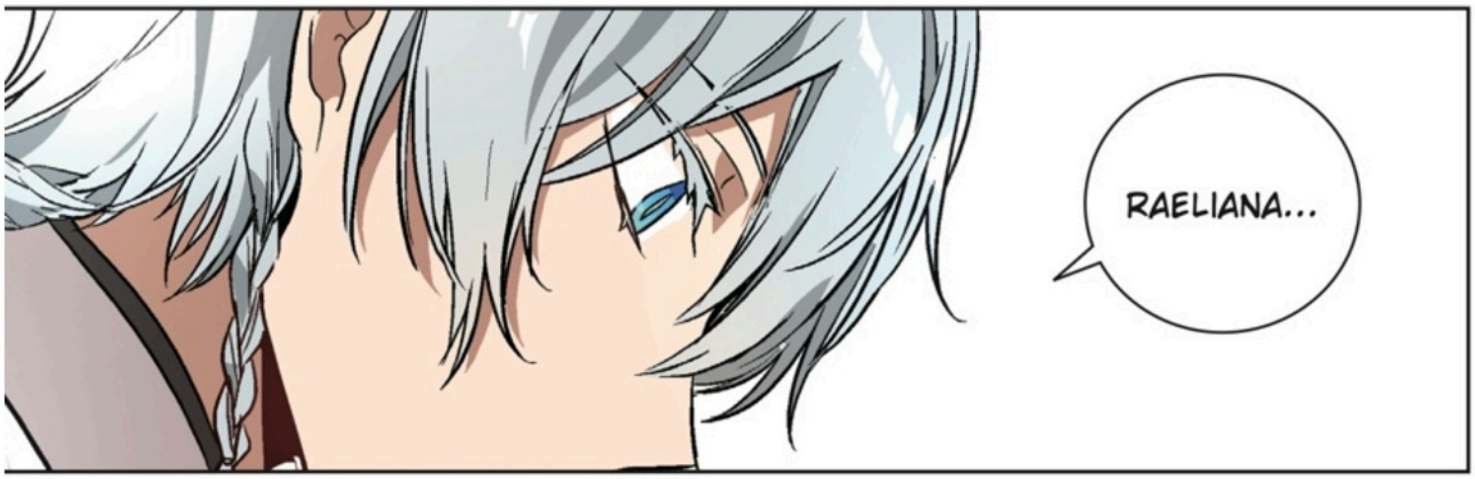
THIS WAY, PLEASE.



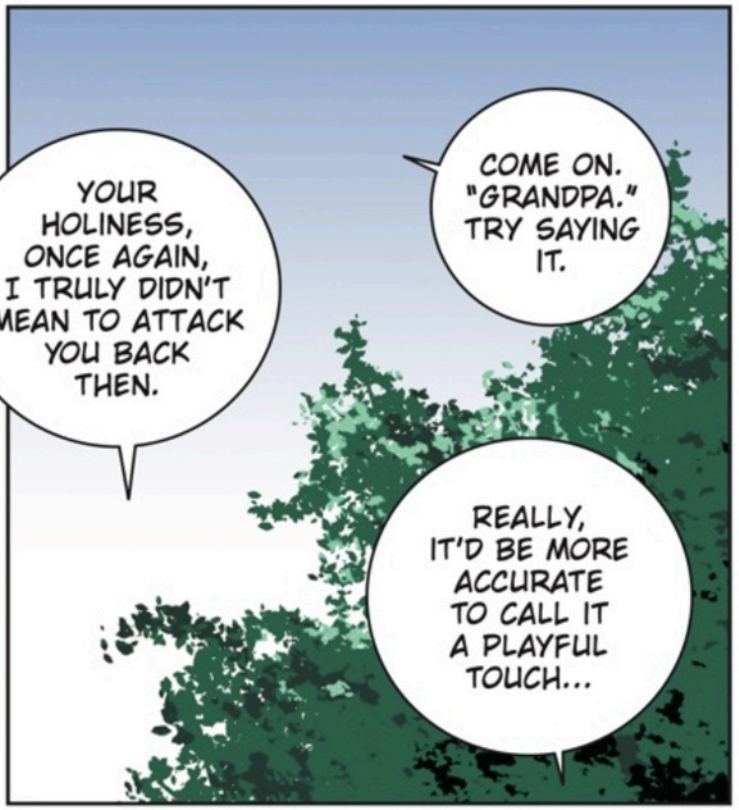

DON'T PAY HIM ANY MIND— YOU'D ONLY BE GIVING HIM THE UPPER HAND.
HOWEVER THAT SEEMED, IT WAS JUST A DELUSION. A DELUSION.
THIS SHOULD BE MY FIRST TIME SEEING THE GODDESS'S STATUE...
WHY IS THERE SOMETHING FAMILIAR ABOUT IT?

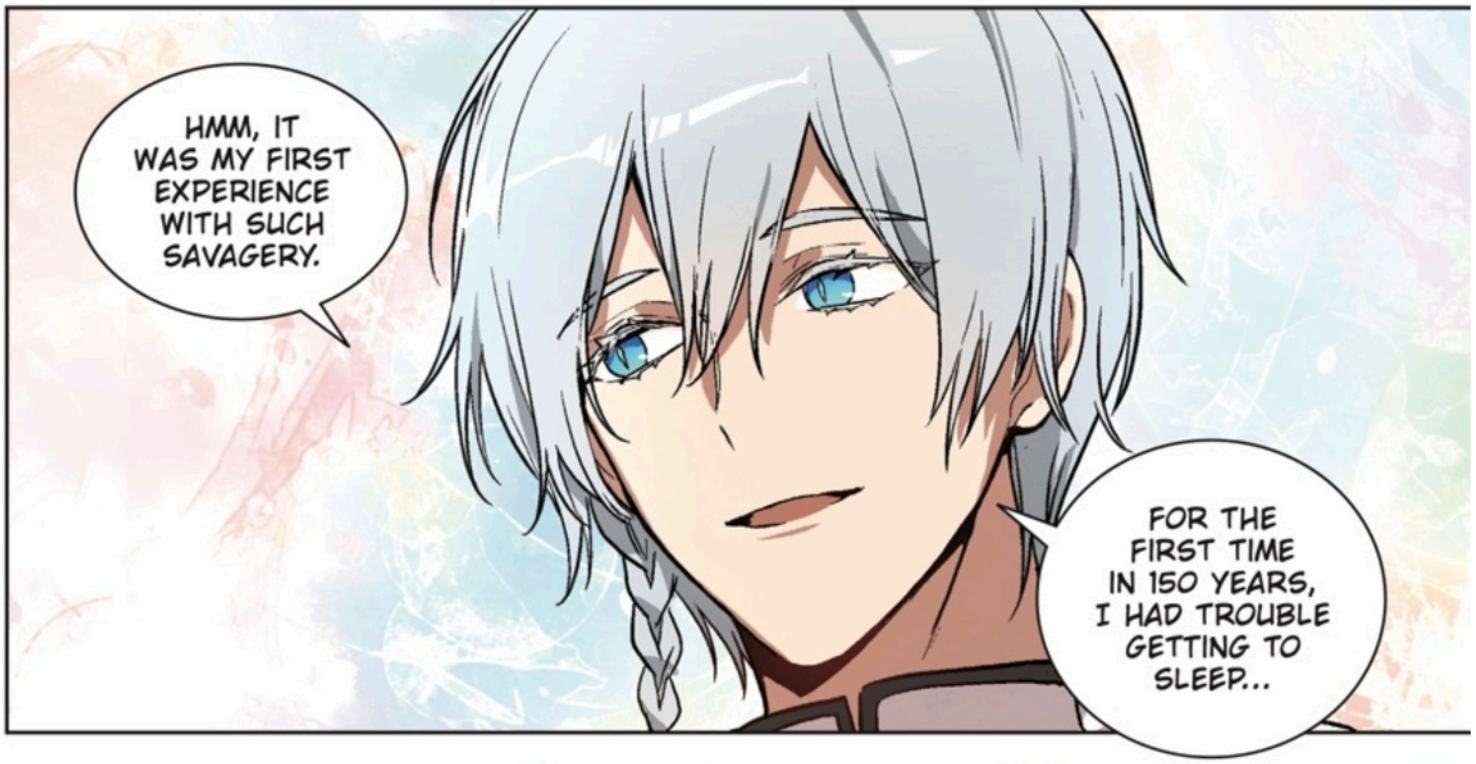

ORDINARILY, THE HIGH PRIEST HIMSELF WOULDN'T PRESIDE OVER THE LIGHTING CEREMONY IN ORDER TO AVOID ACCUSATIONS OF FAVORITISM...

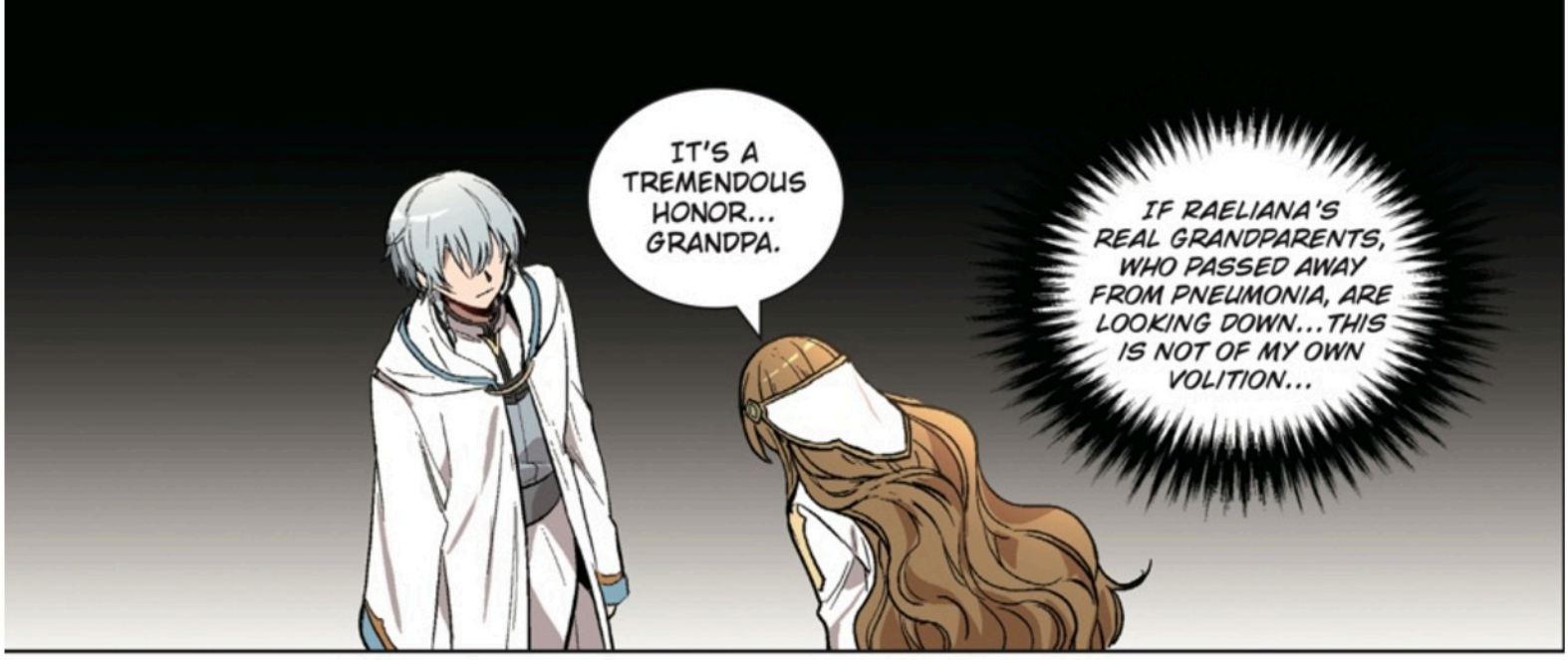

...BUT IT SEEMS AS FAR AS LADY McMILLAN IS CONCERNED, THAT SHIP HAS SAILED.

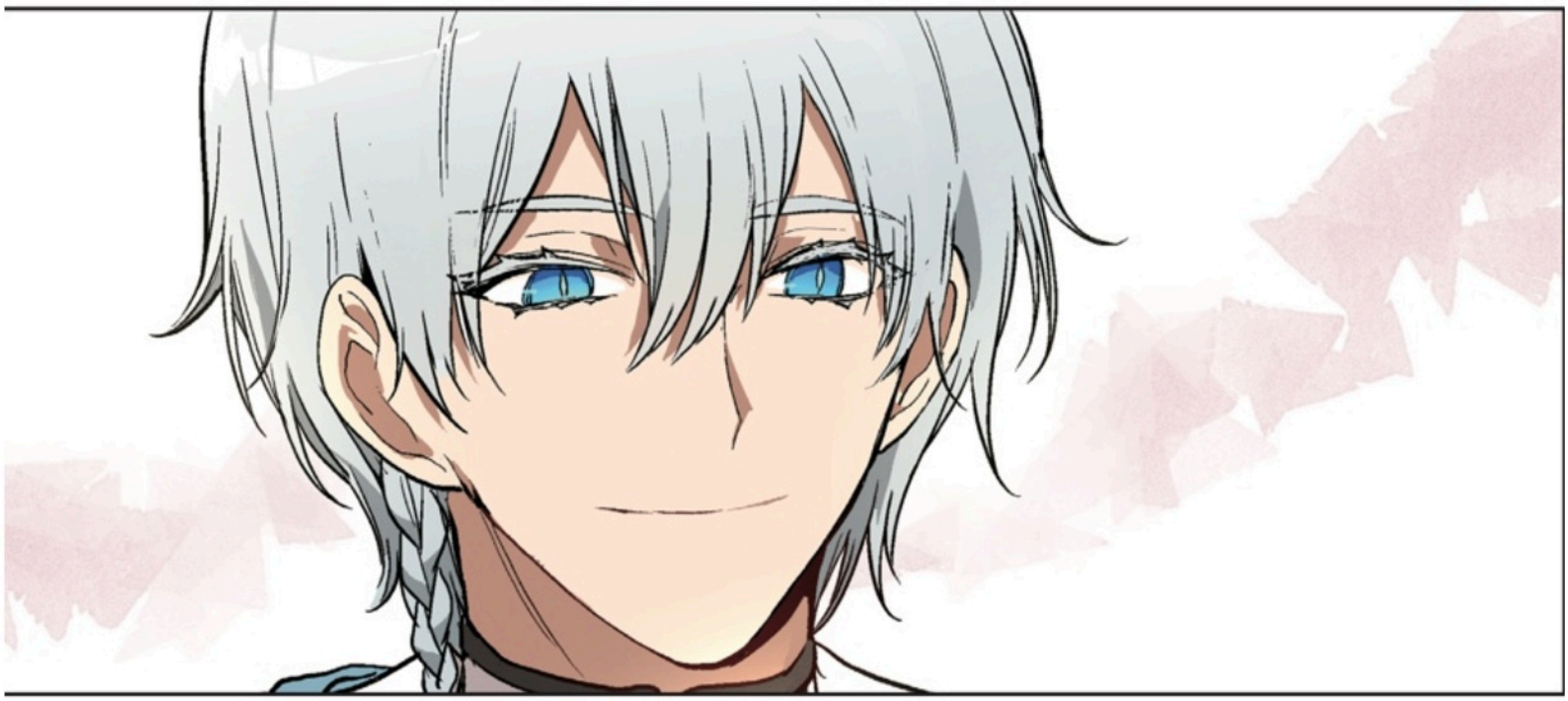

RAELIANA...

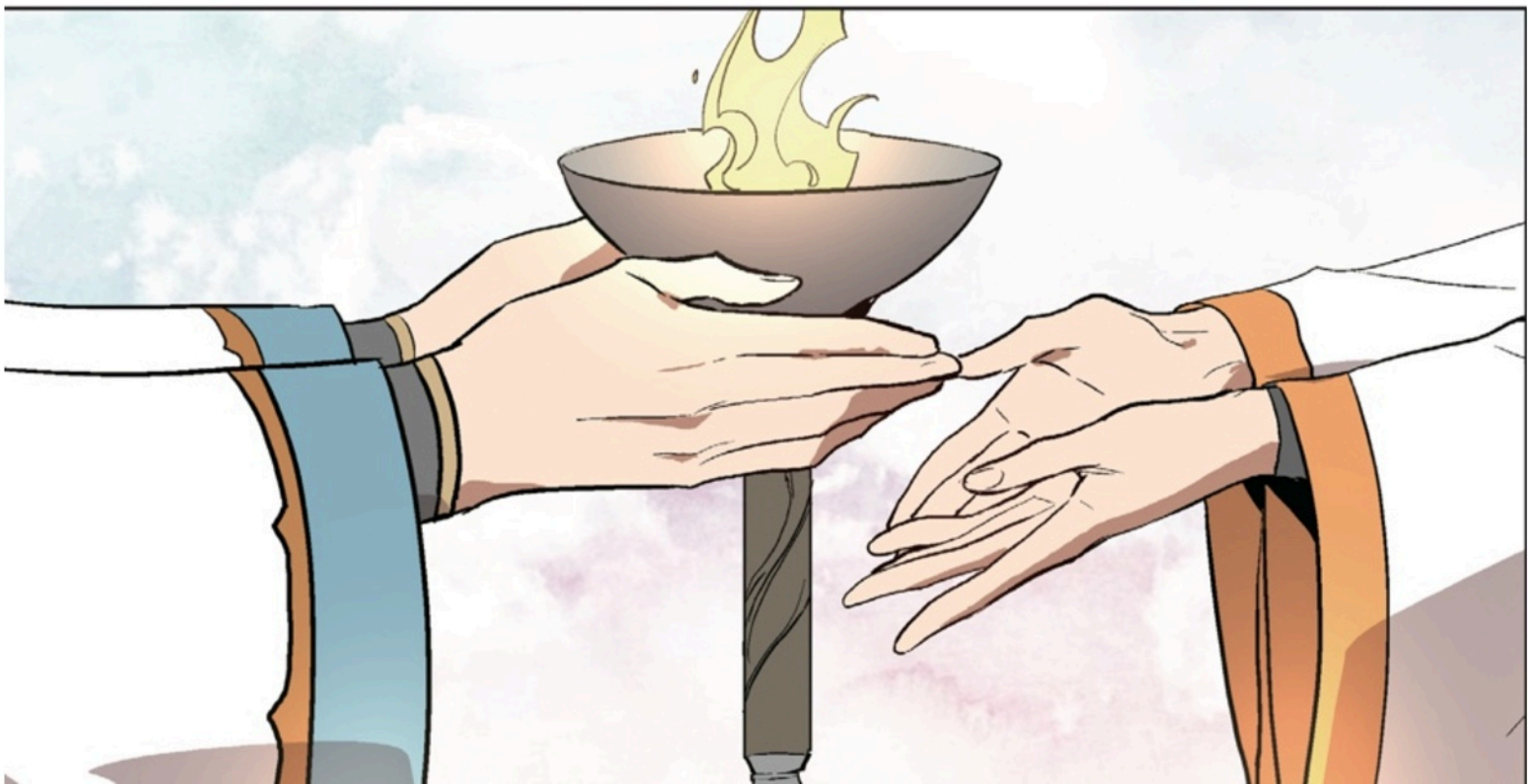
I SHALL BE YOUR GRANDPA.


YOUR HOLINESS, ONCE AGAIN, I TRULY DIDN'T MEAN TO ATTACK YOU BACK THEN.
COME ON. "GRANDPA." TRY SAYING IT.
REALLY, IT'D BE MORE ACCURATE TO CALL IT A PLAYFUL TOUCH...

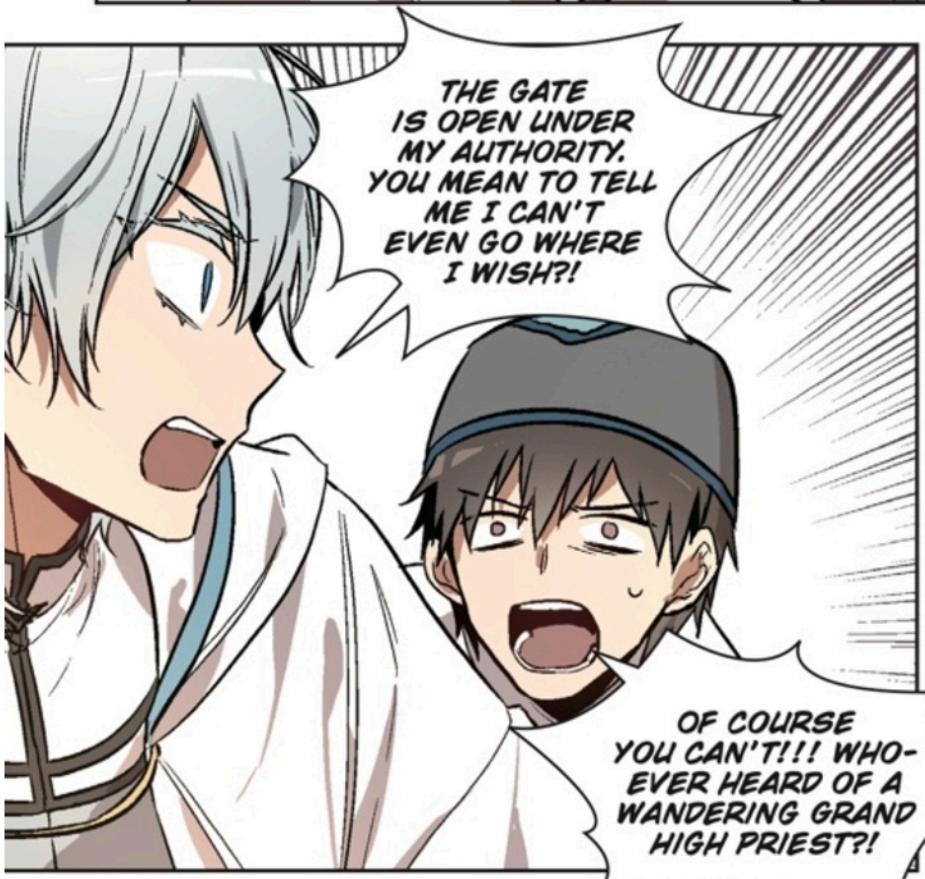

HMM, IT WAS MY FIRST EXPERIENCE WITH SUCH SAVAGERY.
FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 150 YEARS, I HAD TROUBLE GETTING TO SLEEP...


IT'S A TREMENDOUS HONOR... GRANDPA.
IF RAELIANA'S REAL GRANDPARENTS, WHO PASSED AWAY FROM PNEUMONIA, ARE LOOKING DOWN...THIS IS NOT OF MY OWN VOLITION...





AB! SO! LUTE! LY! NOT!!!
YOU CANNOT FOLLOW HER TO THE CAPITAL!!


THE GATE IS OPEN UNDER MY AUTHORITY. YOU MEAN TO TELL ME I CAN'T EVEN GO WHERE I WISH?!
OF COURSE YOU CAN'T!!! WHO-EVER HEARD OF A WANDERING GRAND HIGH PRIEST?!

WADE, YOU'RE IN MY WAY! LET GO!
OVER MY DEAD BODY!!

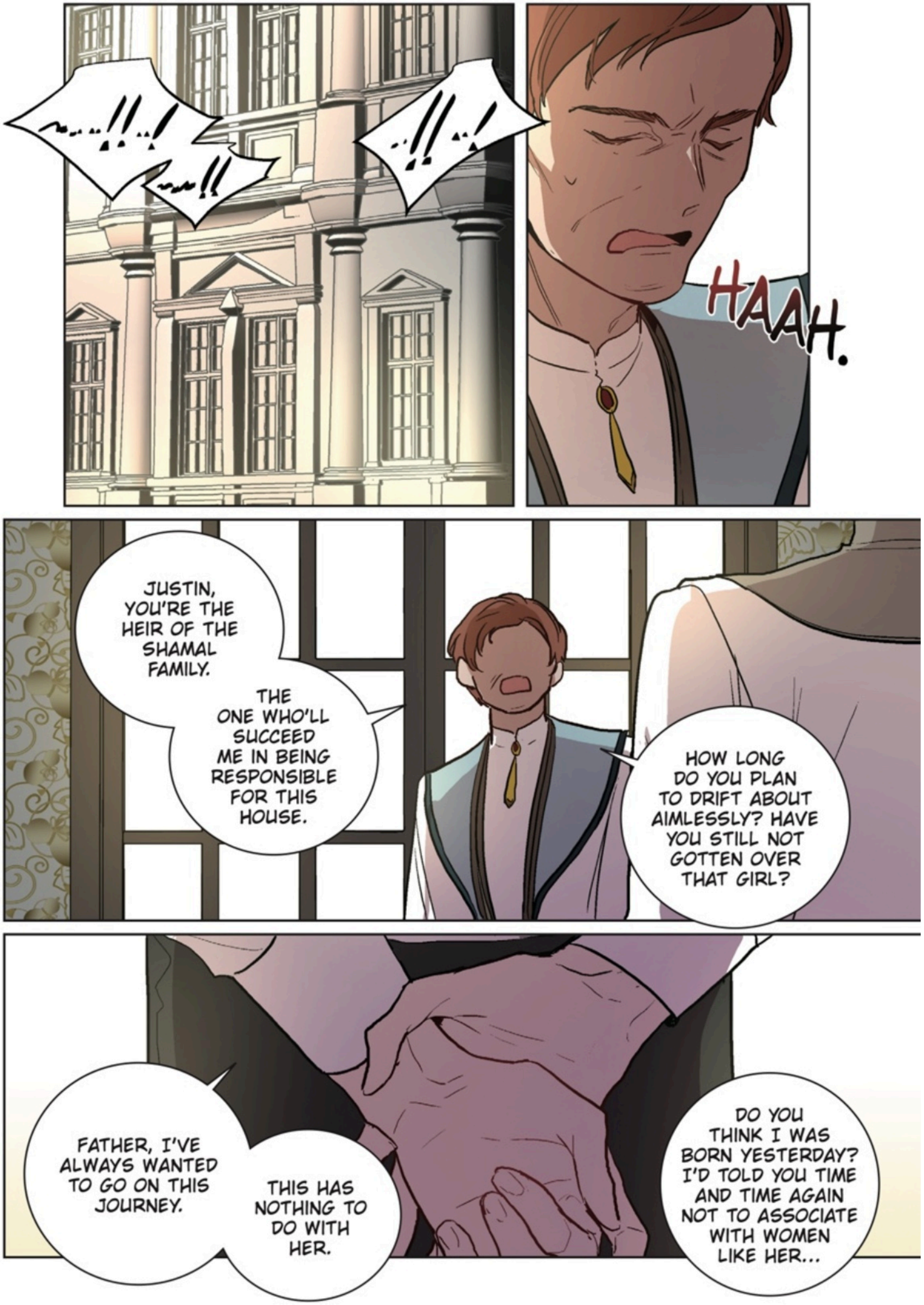
YOU CLINGY LITTLE LEECH! WHY ARE YOU SUDDENLY SO STRONG?!
AAAAH!

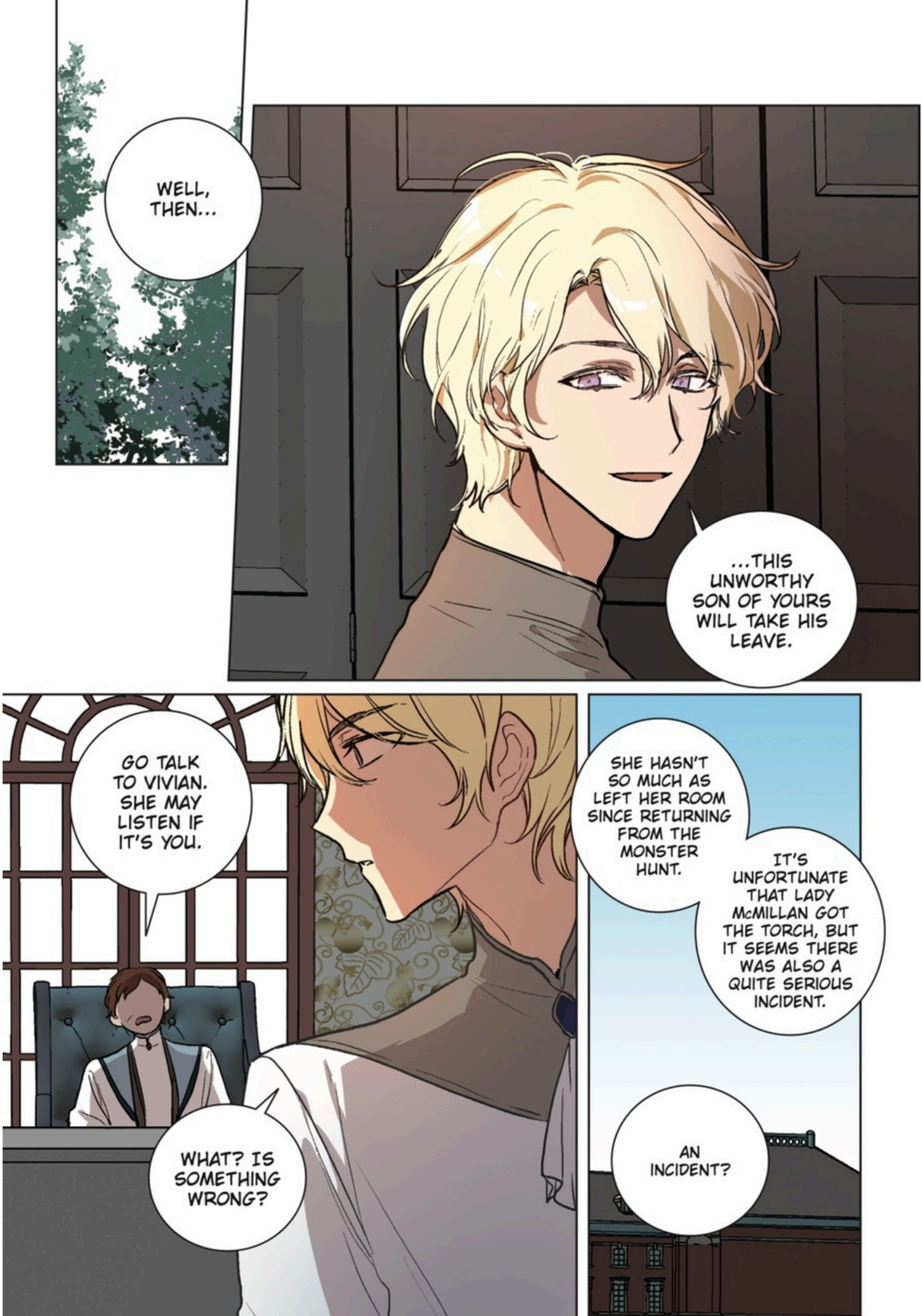
THANK YOU, CHIEF CLERIC...

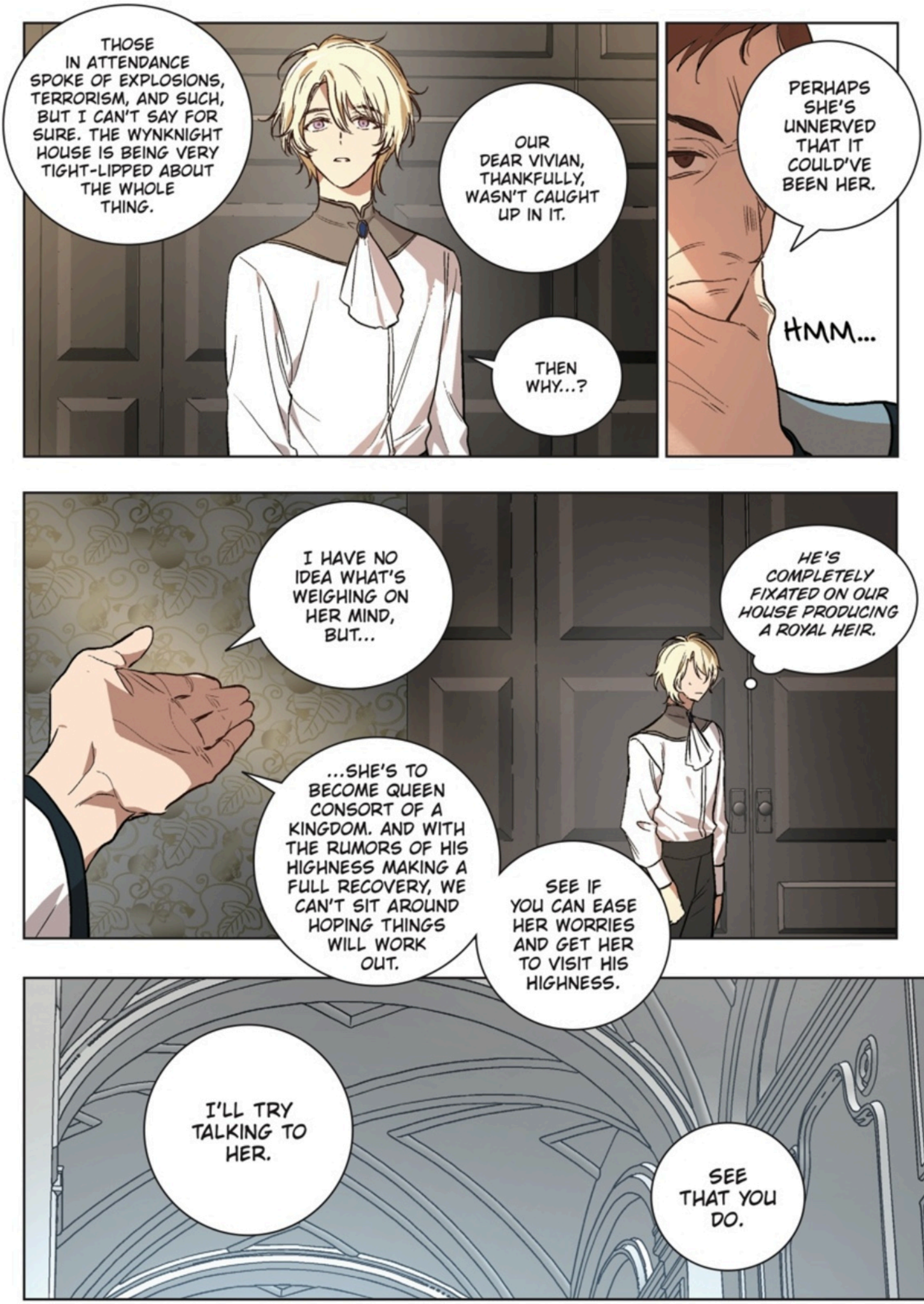
THANK YOU...

Stage 7

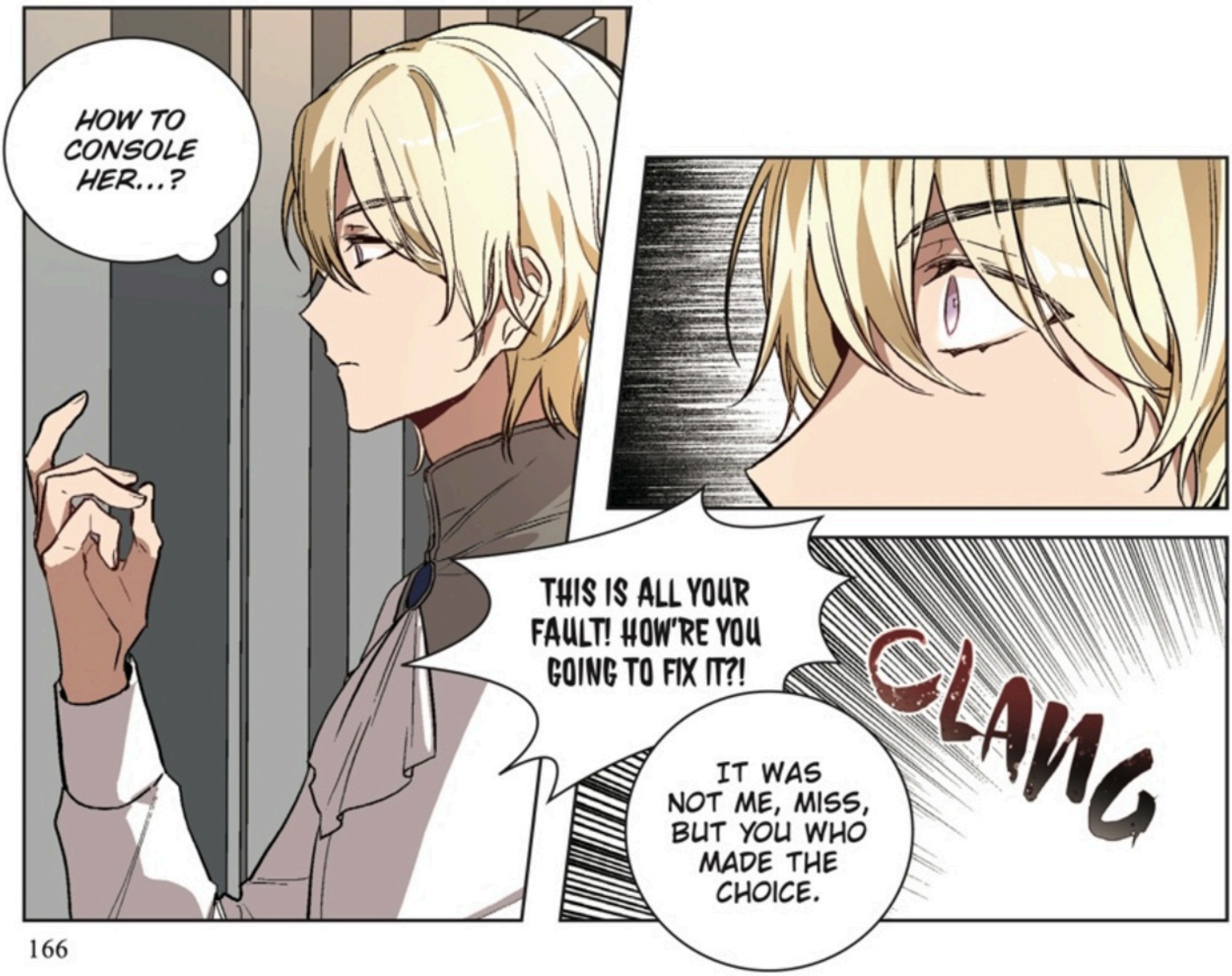
Peaceful Life?

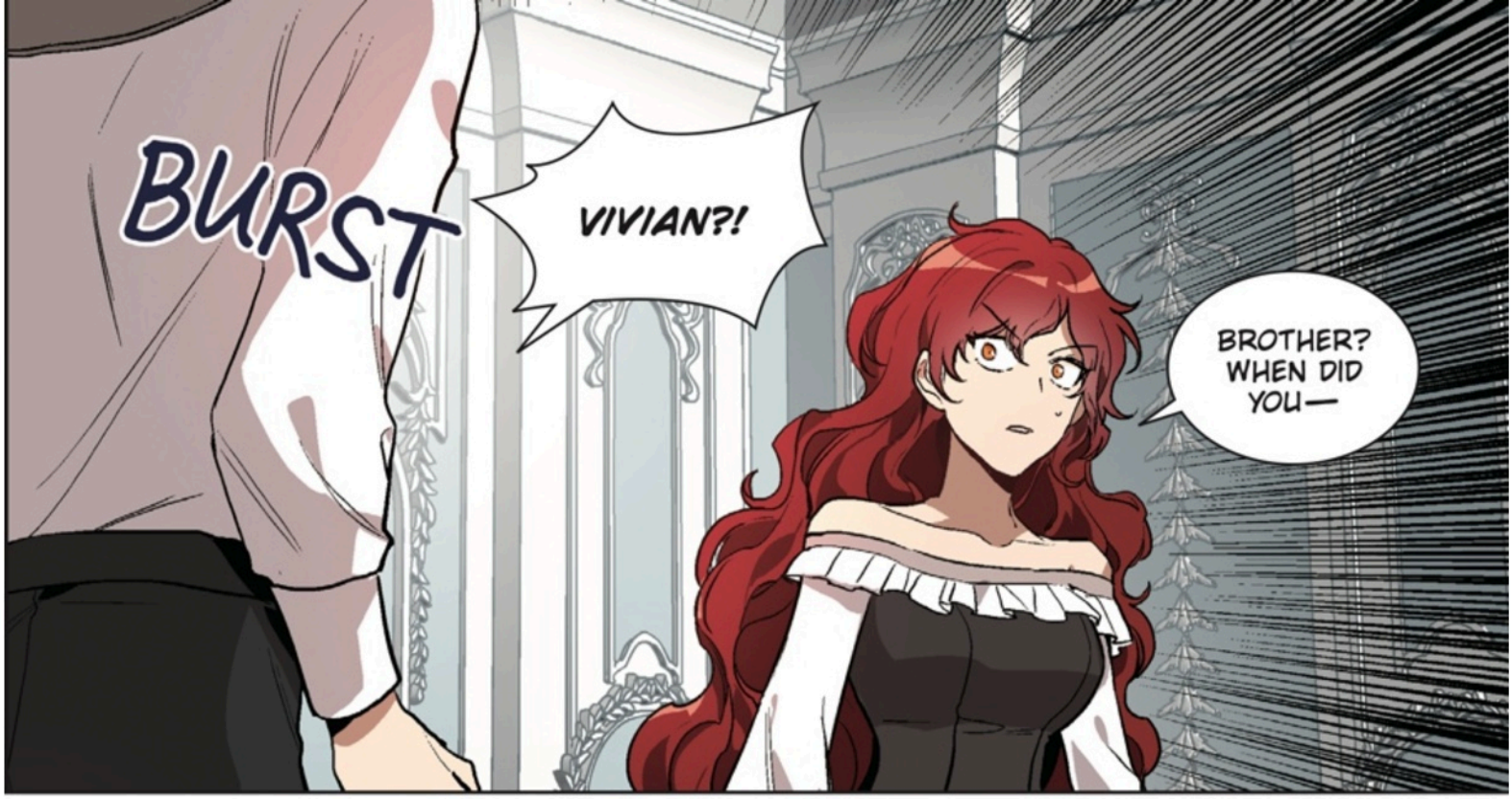

~..!!..!
~..!!
..!!..!
HAAH.
JUSTIN, YOU'RE THE HEIR OF THE SHAMAL FAMILY.
THE ONE WHO'LL SUCCEED ME IN BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS HOUSE.
HOW LONG DO YOU PLAN TO DRIFT ABOUT AIMLESSLY? HAVE YOU STILL NOT GOTTEN OVER THAT GIRL?
FATHER, I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO GO ON THIS JOURNEY.
THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH HER.
DO YOU THINK I WAS BORN YESTERDAY? I'D TOLD YOU TIME AND TIME AGAIN NOT TO ASSOCIATE WITH WOMEN LIKE HER...

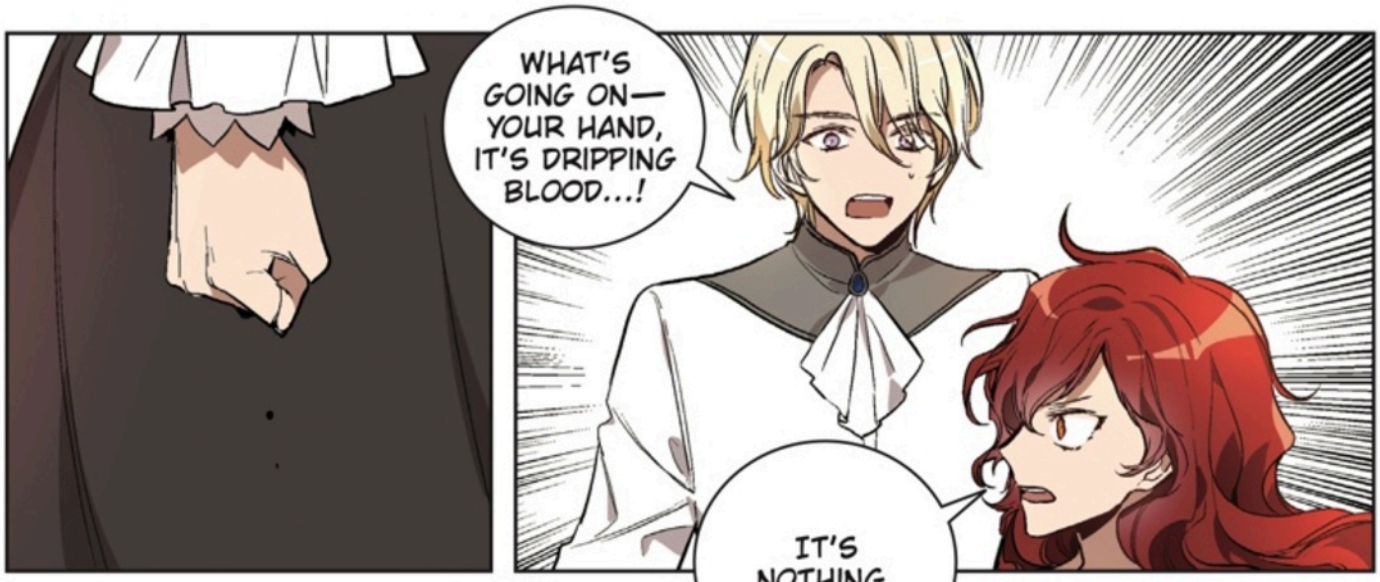

WELL, THEN...
...THIS UNWORTHY SON OF YOURS WILL TAKE HIS LEAVE.
GO TALK TO VIVIAN. SHE MAY LISTEN IF IT'S YOU.
WHAT? IS SOMETHING WRONG?
SHE HASN'T SO MUCH AS LEFT HER ROOM SINCE RETURNING FROM THE MONSTER HUNT.
IT'S UNFORTUNATE THAT LADY McMILLAN GOT THE TORCH, BUT IT SEEMS THERE WAS ALSO A QUITE SERIOUS INCIDENT.
AN INCIDENT?

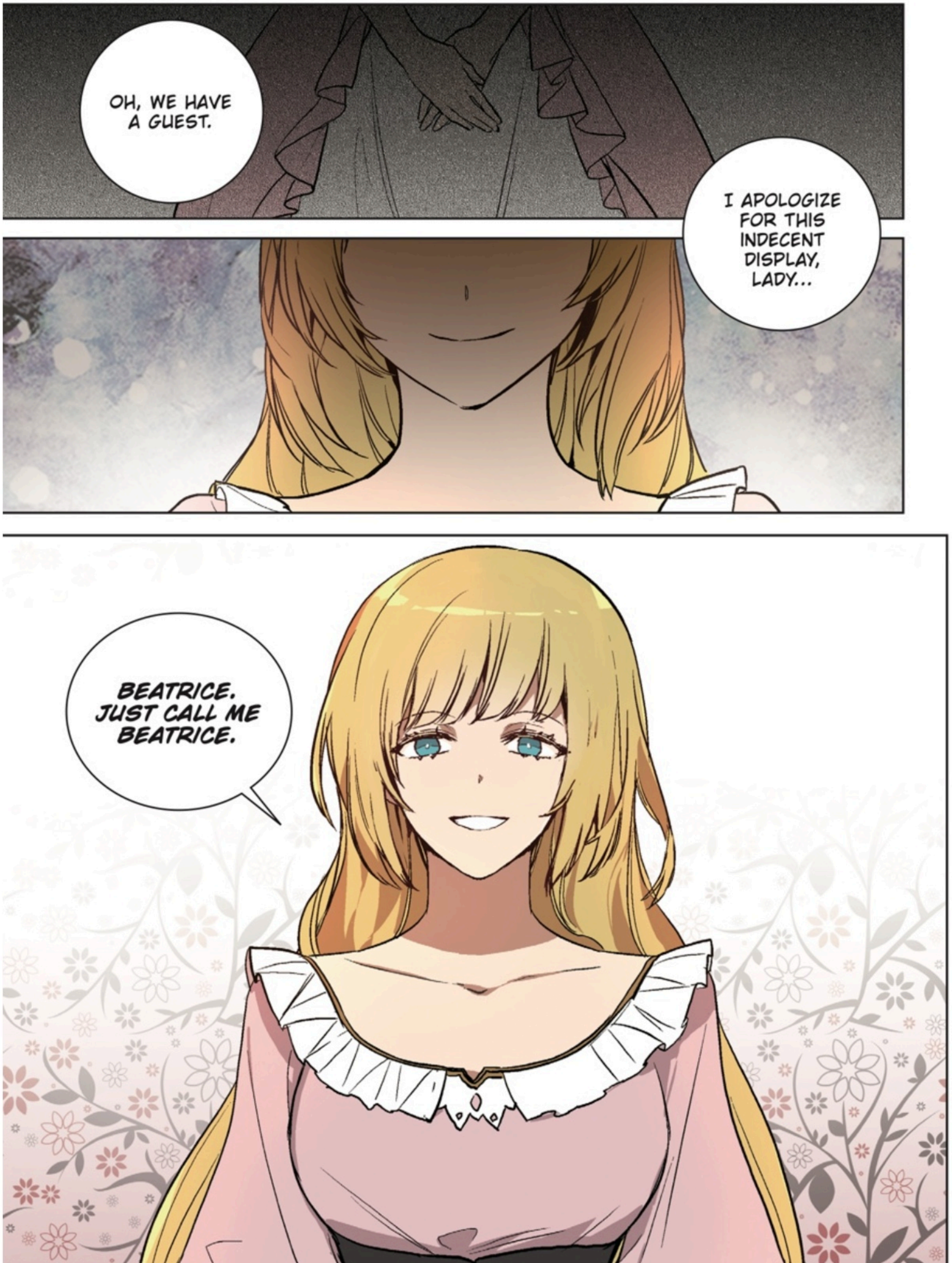

THOSE IN ATTENDANCE SPOKE OF EXPLOSIONS, TERRORISM, AND SUCH, BUT I CAN'T SAY FOR SURE. THE WYNKNIGHT HOUSE IS BEING VERY TIGHT-LIPPED ABOUT THE WHOLE THING.
OUR DEAR VIVIAN, THANKFULLY, WASN'T CAUGHT UP IN IT.
THEN WHY...?
PERHAPS SHE'S UNNERVED THAT IT COULD'VE BEEN HER.
HMM...
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT'S WEIGHING ON HER MIND, BUT...
...SHE'S TO BECOME QUEEN CONSORT OF A KINGDOM. AND WITH THE RUMORS OF HIS HIGHNESS MAKING A FULL RECOVERY, WE CAN'T SIT AROUND HOPING THINGS WILL WORK OUT.
HE'S COMPLETELY FIXATED ON OUR HOUSE PRODUCING A ROYAL HEIR.
SEE IF YOU CAN EASE HER WORRIES AND GET HER TO VISIT HIS HIGHNESS.
I'LL TRY TALKING TO HER.
SEE THAT YOU DO.

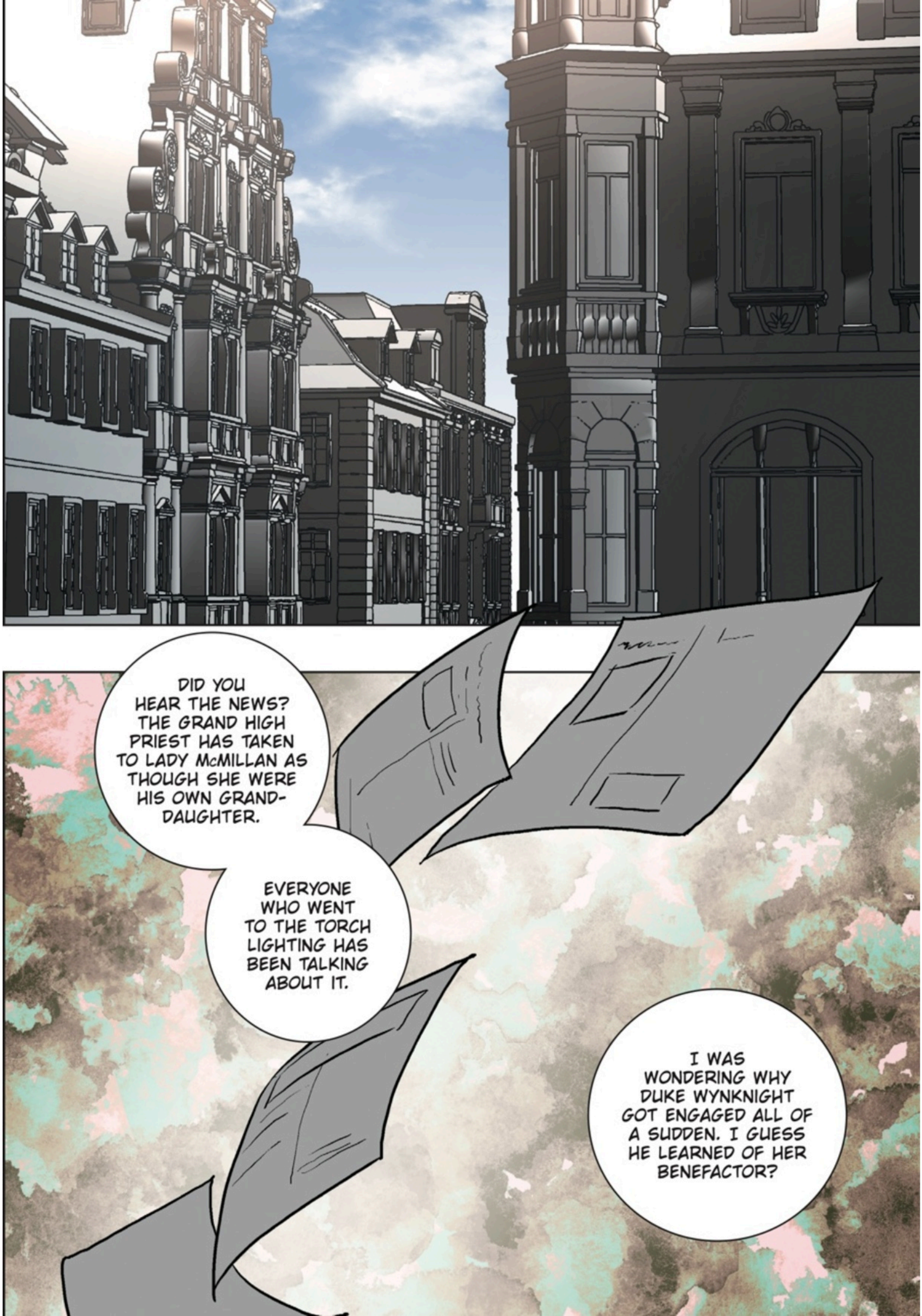
LITTLE VIVIAN'S THROWING A TANTRUM, HUH...
IT MUST BE OVER DUKE WYNKNIGHT'S FIANCÊE.

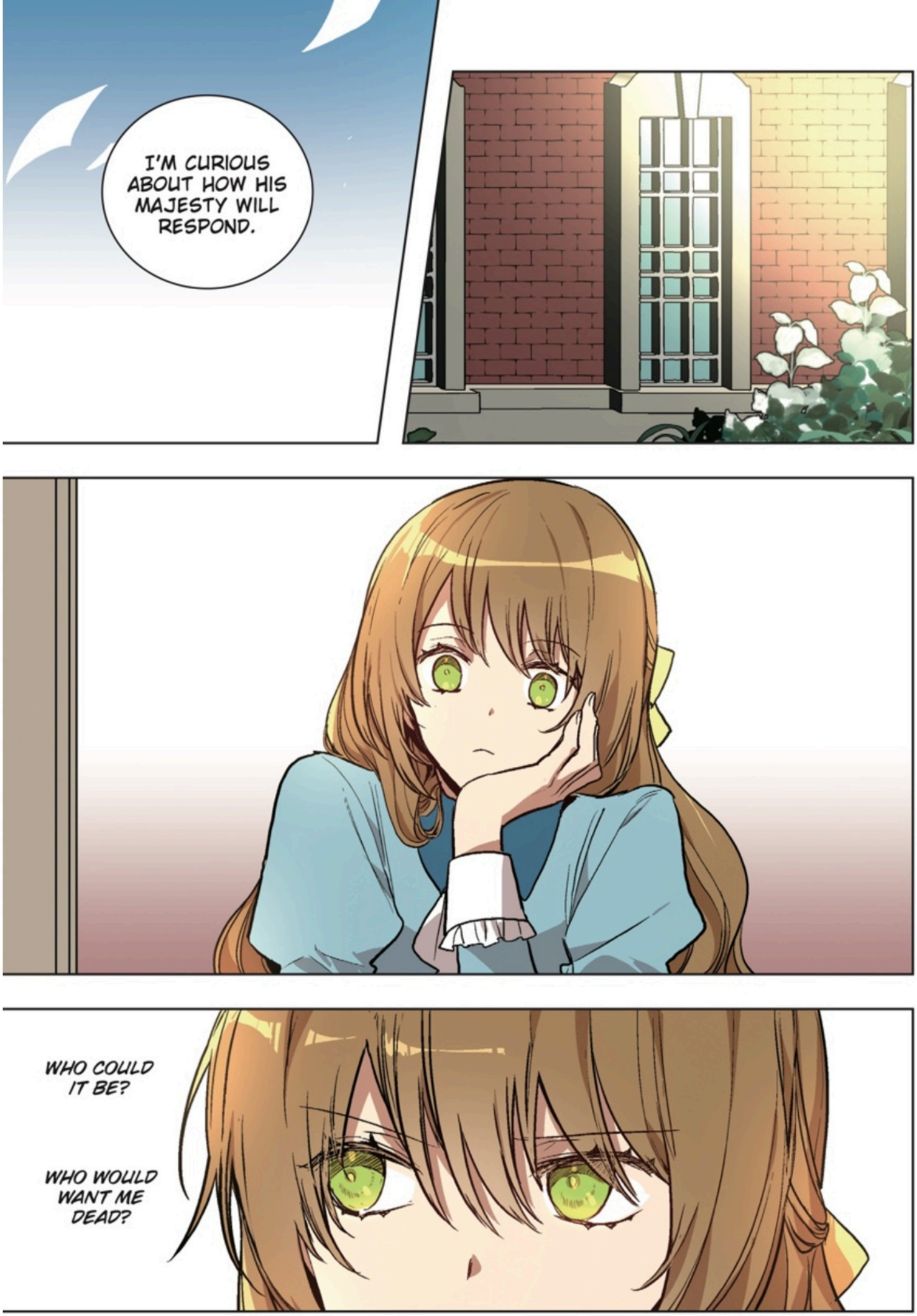

HOW TO CONSOLE HER...?
THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT! HOW'RE YOU GOING TO FIX IT?!
CLANG
IT WAS NOT ME, MISS, BUT YOU WHO MADE THE CHOICE.

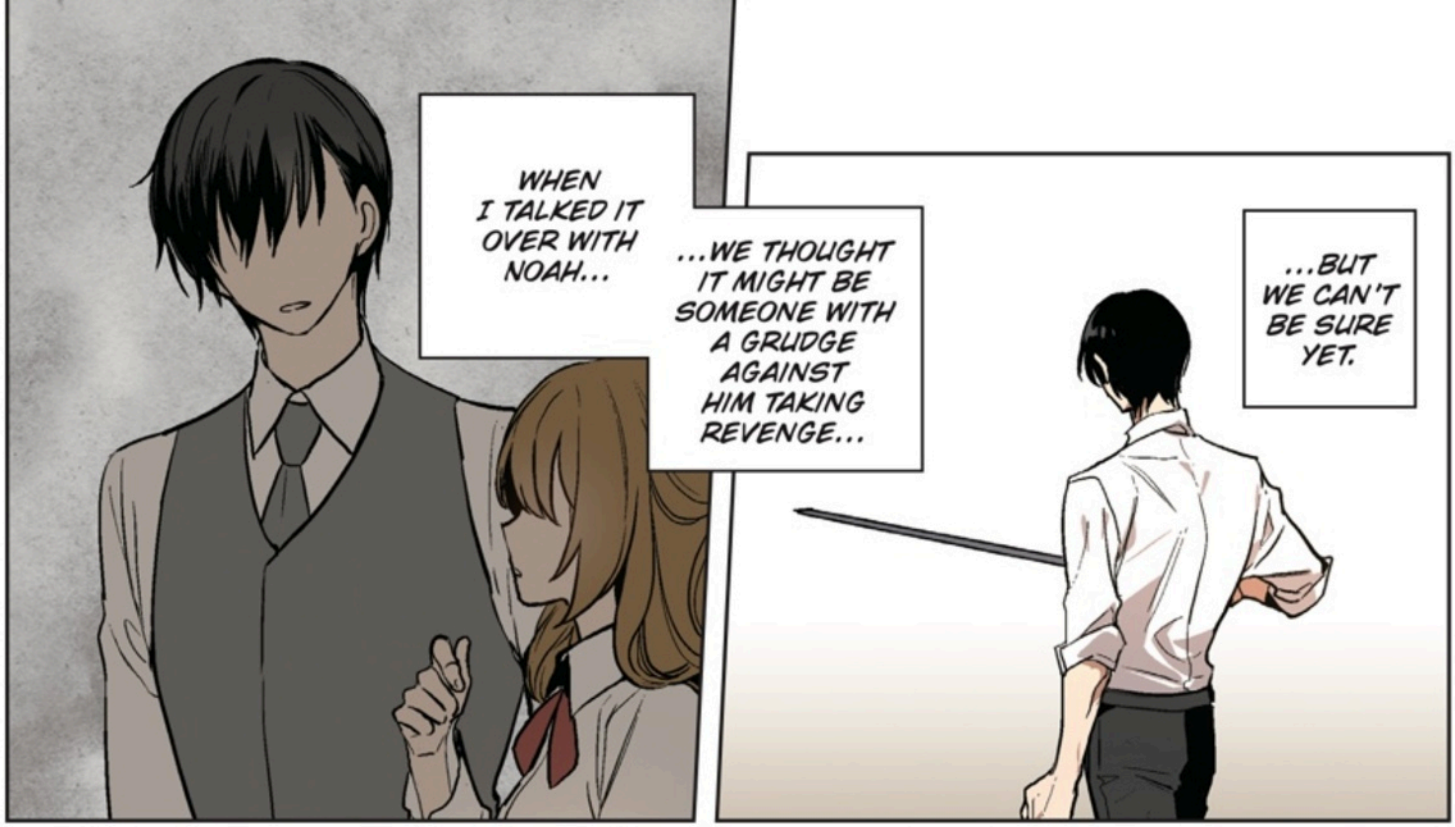

BURST
VIVIAN?!
BROTHER? WHEN DID YOU—


WHAT'S GOING ON— YOUR HAND, IT'S DRIPPING BLOOD...!
IT'S NOTHING.

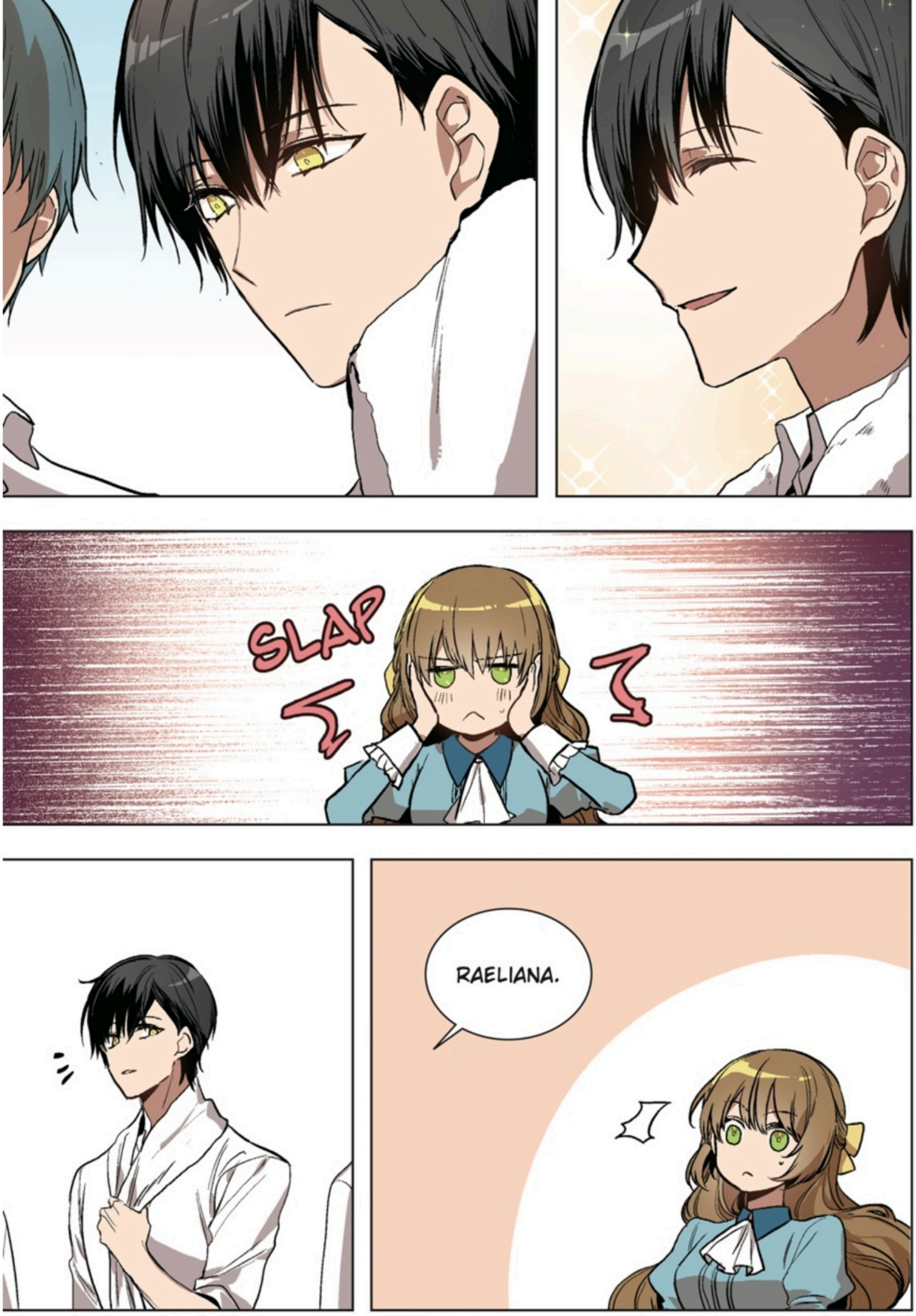

OH, WE HAVE A GUEST.
I APOLOGIZE FOR THIS INDECENT DISPLAY, LADY...
BEATRICE. JUST CALL ME BEATRICE.

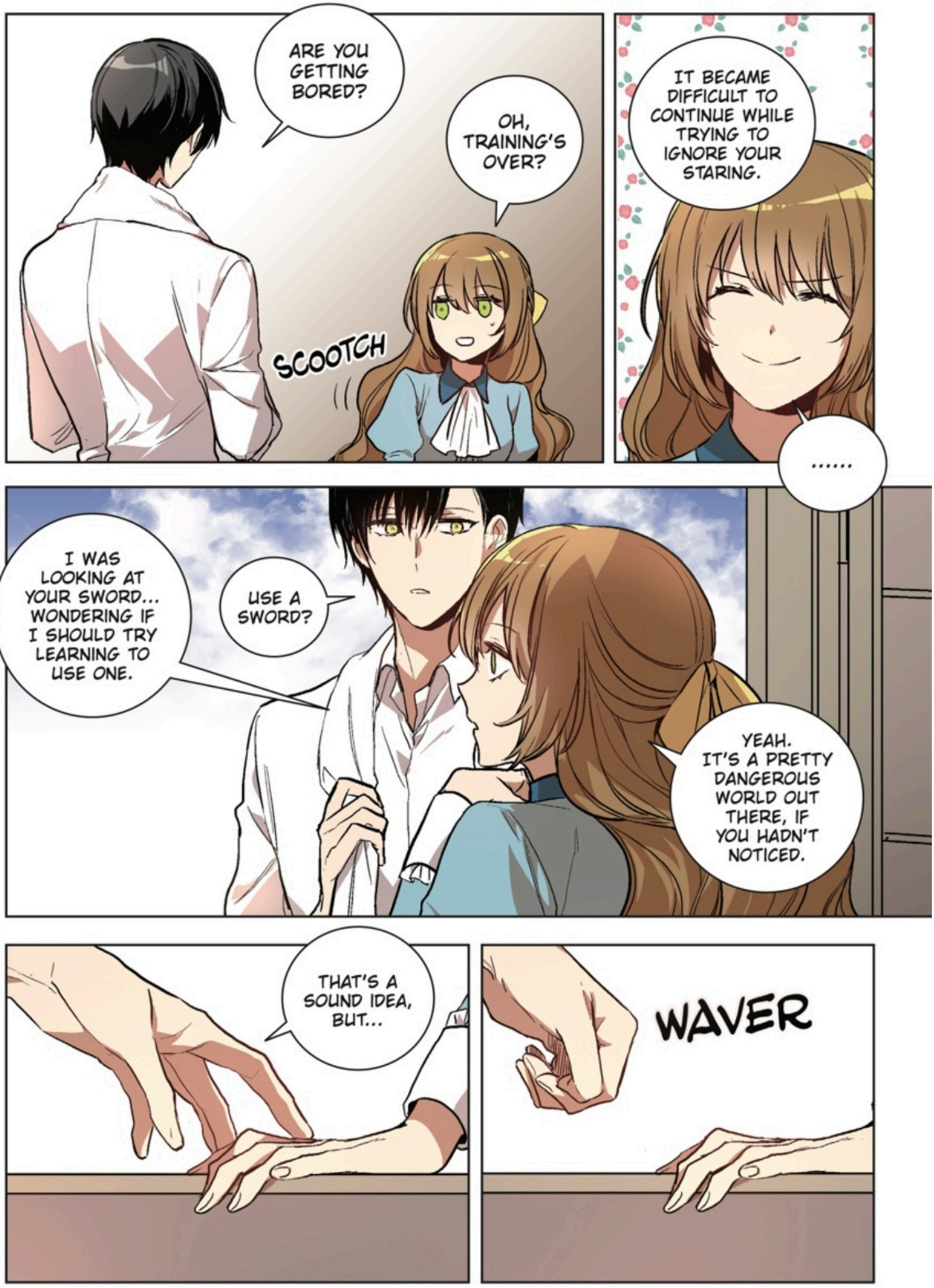

DID YOU HEAR THE NEWS? THE GRAND HIGH PRIEST HAS TAKEN TO LADY McMILLAN AS THOUGH SHE WERE HIS OWN GRAND-DAUGHTER.
EVERYONE WHO WENT TO THE TORCH LIGHTING HAS BEEN TALKING ABOUT IT.
I WAS WONDERING WHY DUKE WYNKNIGHT GOT ENGAGED ALL OF A SUDDEN. I GUESS HE LEARNED OF HER BENEFACTOR?


I'M CURIOUS ABOUT HOW HIS MAJESTY WILL RESPOND.
WHO COULD IT BE?
WHO WOULD WANT ME DEAD?


WHEN I TALKED IT OVER WITH NOAH...
...WE THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE SOMEONE WITH A GRUDGE AGAINST HIM TAKING REVENGE...
...BUT WE CAN'T BE SURE YET.

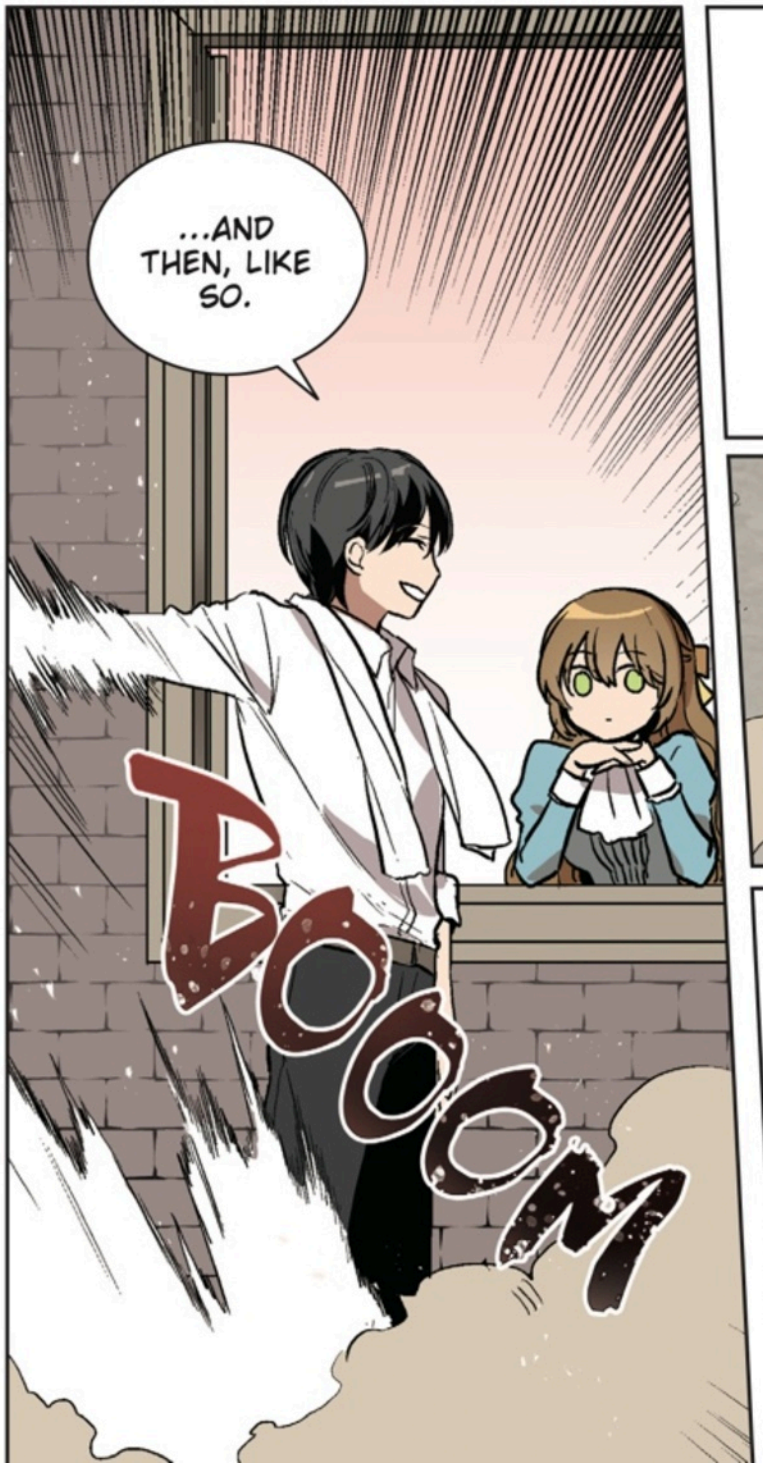
"A MAN WHO HOLDS THE SWORD CLOSER THAN THE PEN" WAS HOW THE ORIGINAL NOVEL DESCRIBED NOAH.
AS IT IS, IT'S ONLY HIS DUTY TO SERVE THE KING THAT HAS HIM SWIMMING IN PAPERWORK.

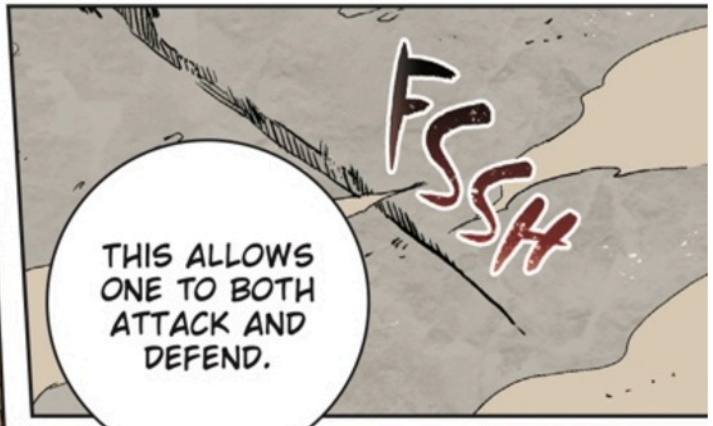

SLAP
RAELIANA.


ARE YOU GETTING BORED?
OH, TRAINING'S OVER?
SCOOTCH
IT BECAME DIFFICULT TO CONTINUE WHILE TRYING TO IGNORE YOUR STARING.
.....
I WAS LOOKING AT YOUR SWORD... WONDERING IF I SHOULD TRY LEARNING TO USE ONE.
USE A SWORD?
YEAH. IT'S A PRETTY DANGEROUS WORLD OUT THERE, IF YOU HADN'T NOTICED.
THAT'S A SOUND IDEA, BUT...
WAVER

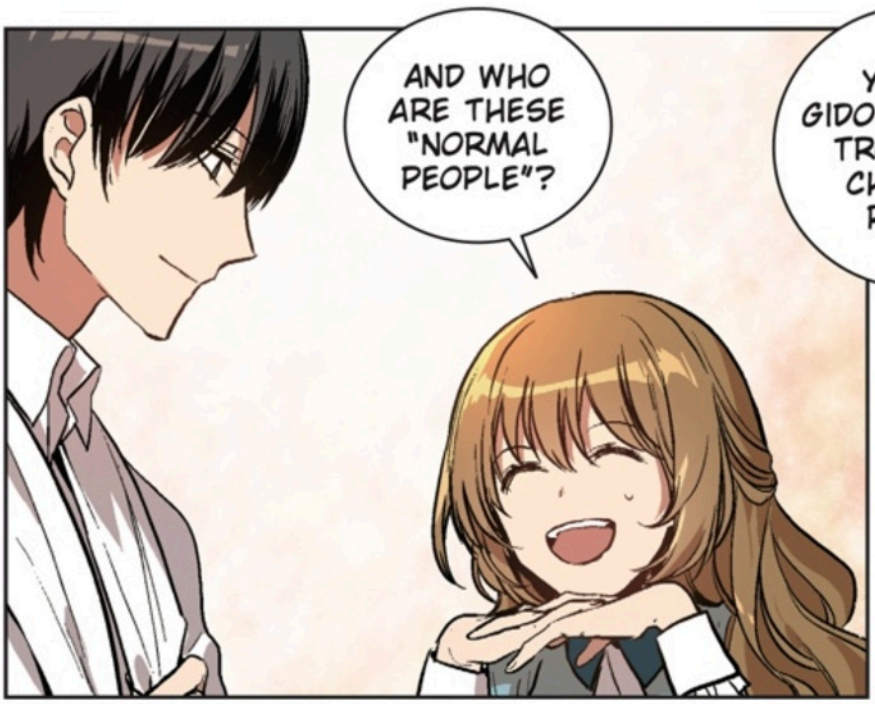
...YOUR HANDS WOULD GET CALLOUSED.
PRETTY AS MY HANDS ARE, I HAPPEN TO VALUE MY LIFE MORE.
WELL, THERE ARE WAYS TO AVOID BLISTERS.
DO YOU WANT TO LEARN?
REALLY? HOW?
SHK
ALLOW ME TO DEMONSTRATE.

FIRST, FOCUS YOUR ENERGY...

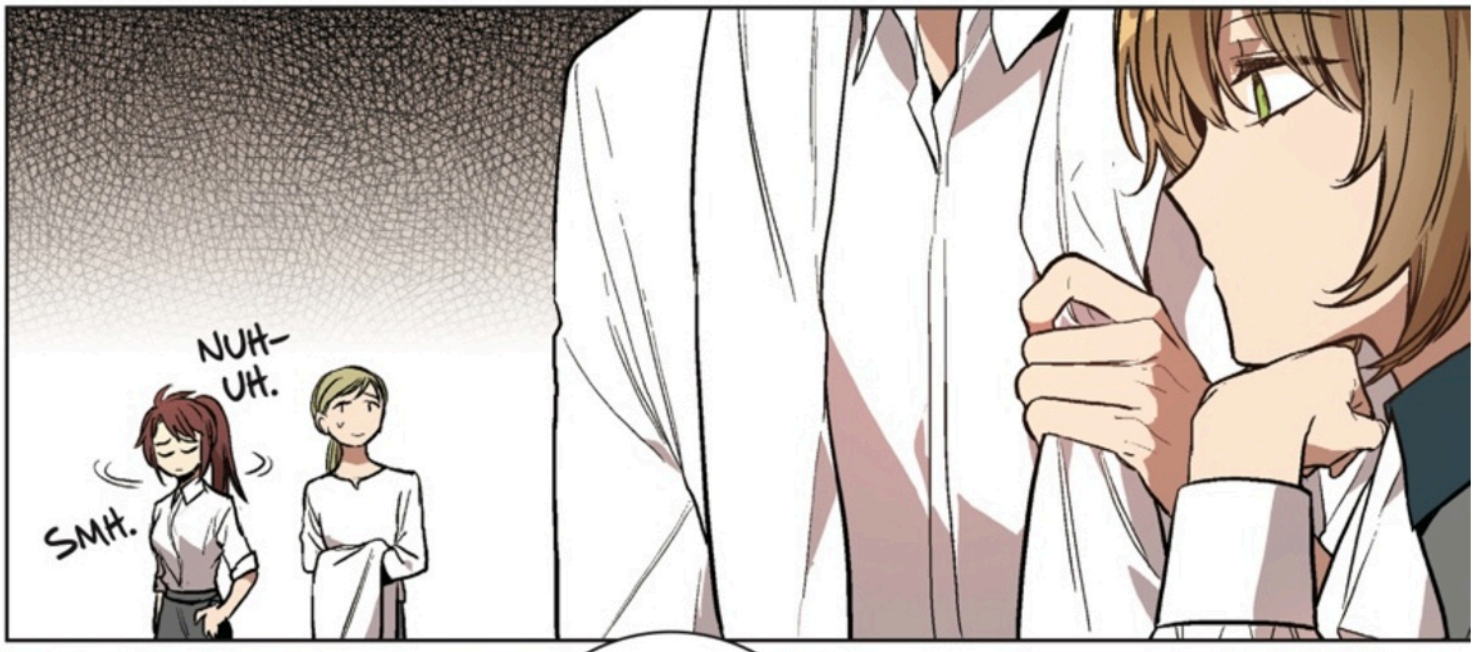

...AND THEN, LIKE SO.
BOOOM

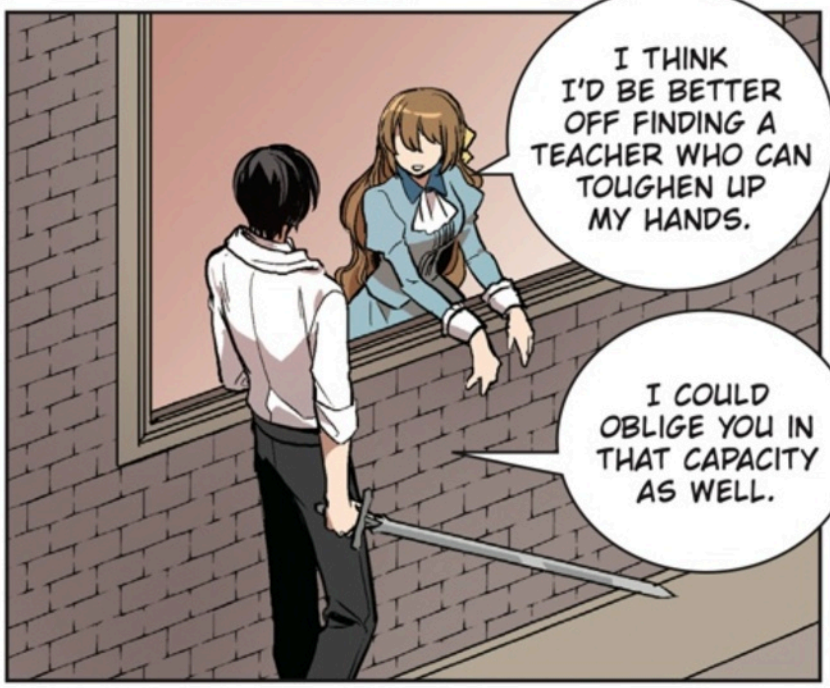

FSSH
THIS ALLOWS ONE TO BOTH ATTACK AND DEFEND.

HEY, NOAH.
YES?
IS THAT... SOMETHING NORMAL PEOPLE CAN DO?
SMILE
BUT OF COURSE.
DON'T LIE TO ME...


AND WHO ARE THESE "NORMAL PEOPLE"?

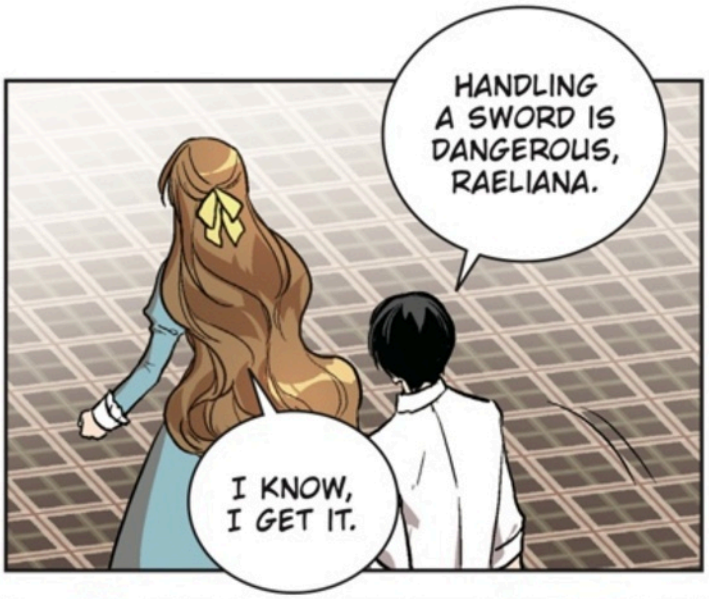
YUSUF GIDOU, JUDAH TROPIATZ, CHISAGA RYO...
...CALAENTE, JUSTIN SHAMAL...
...ADAM TAYLOR.


NUH-UH.
SMH.


I THINK I'D BE BETTER OFF FINDING A TEACHER WHO CAN TOUGHEN UP MY HANDS.
I COULD OBLIGE YOU IN THAT CAPACITY AS WELL.

SHAKE SHAKE

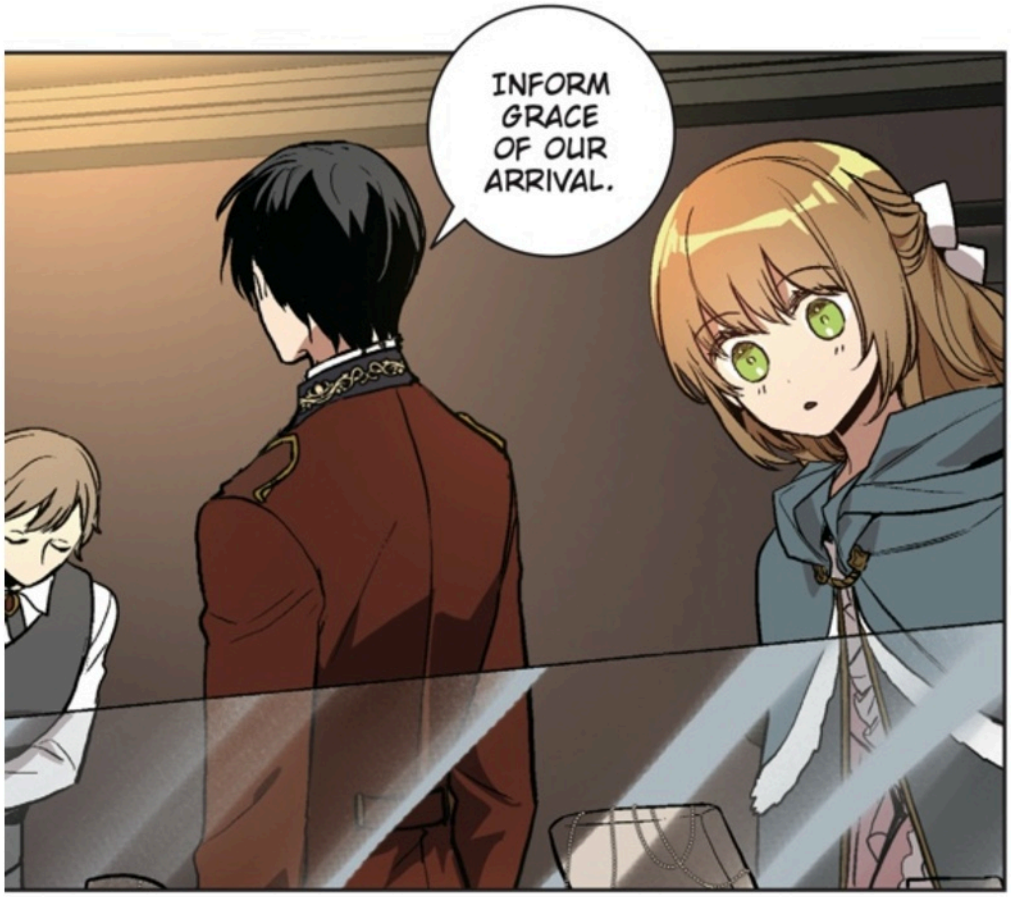
NO THANK YOU. JUST FORGET I BROUGHT IT UP.
I'LL BE GOING, THEN.

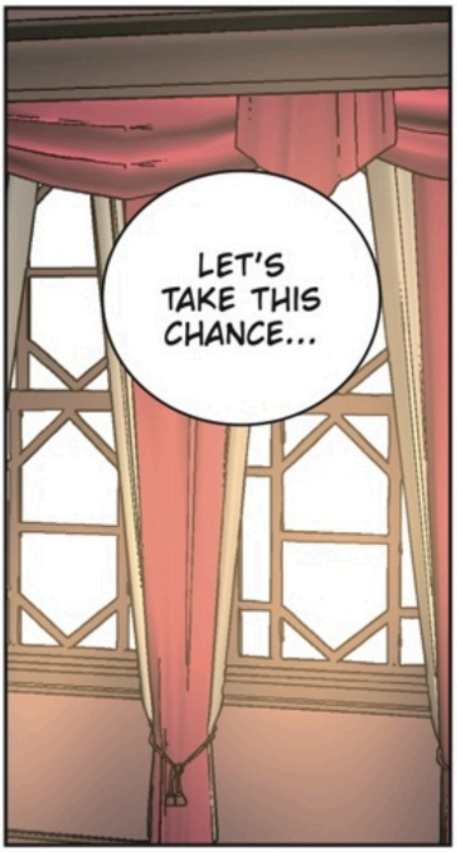

HANDLING A SWORD IS DANGEROUS, RAELIANA.
I KNOW, I GET IT.

.....

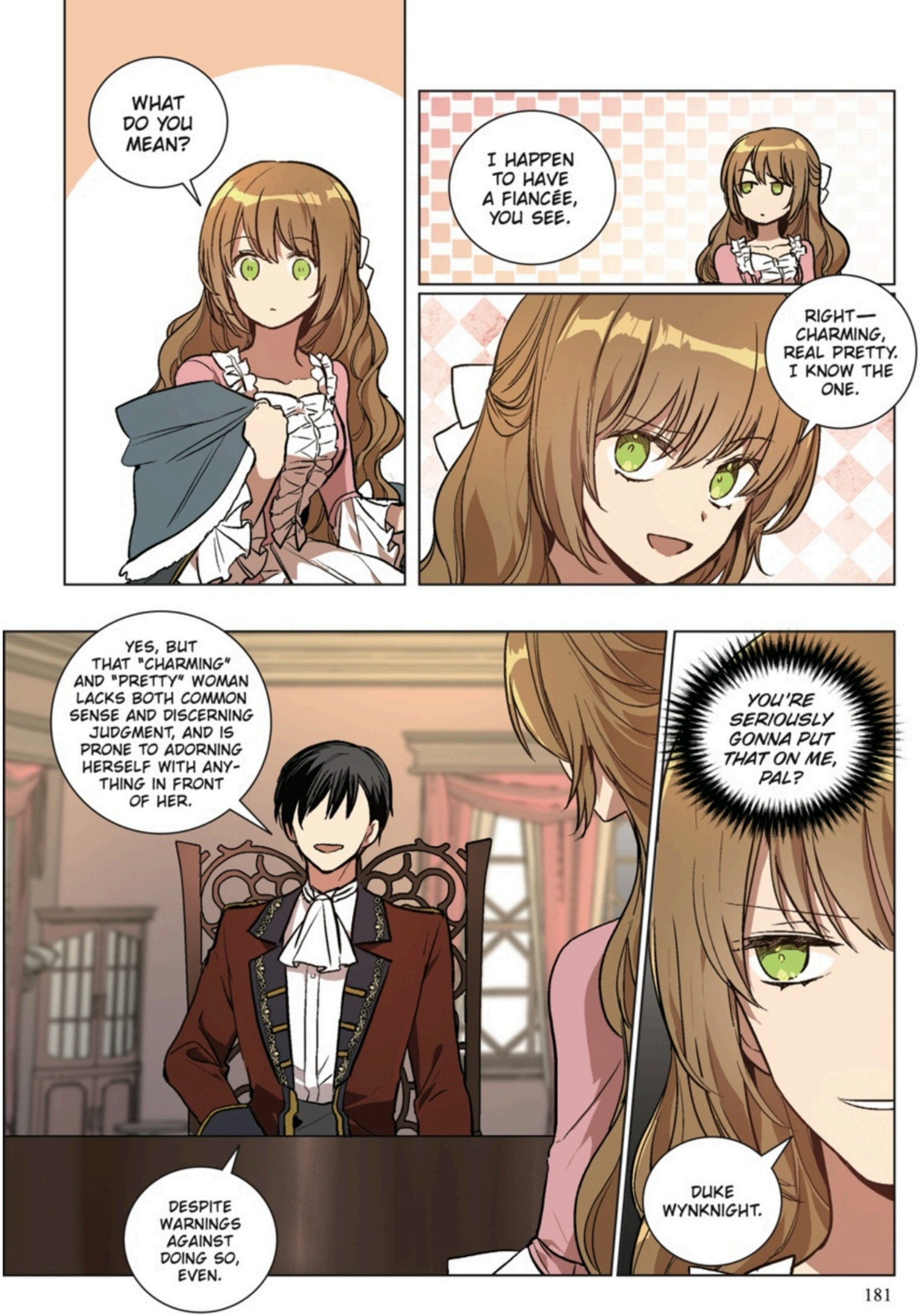
IF YOU'RE BORED, MIGHT I SUGGEST SOMETHING YOU'D MORE ENJOY?
SOMETHING I'D MORE ENJOY?

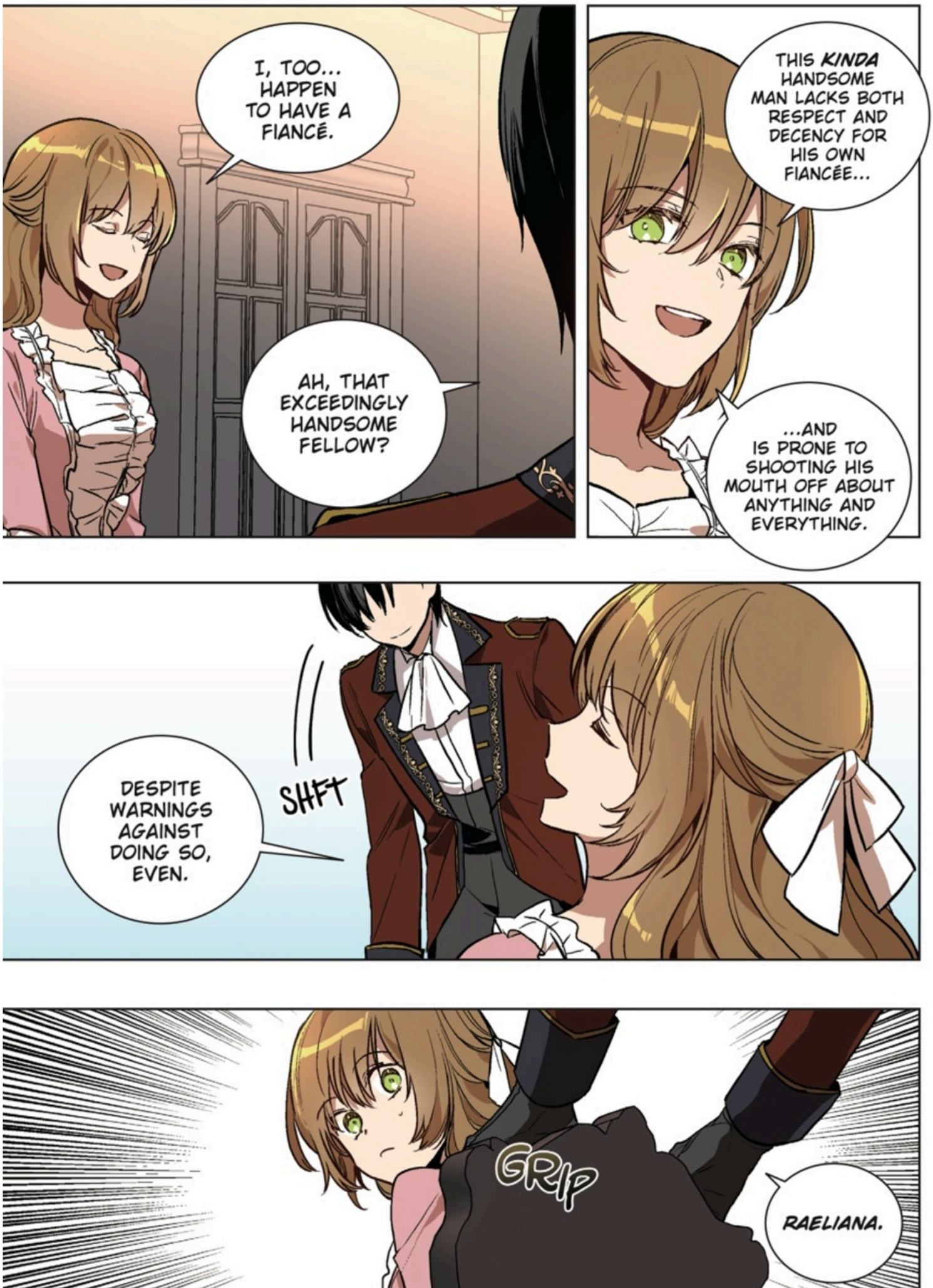
Why Raeliana Ended Up at the Duke's Mansion

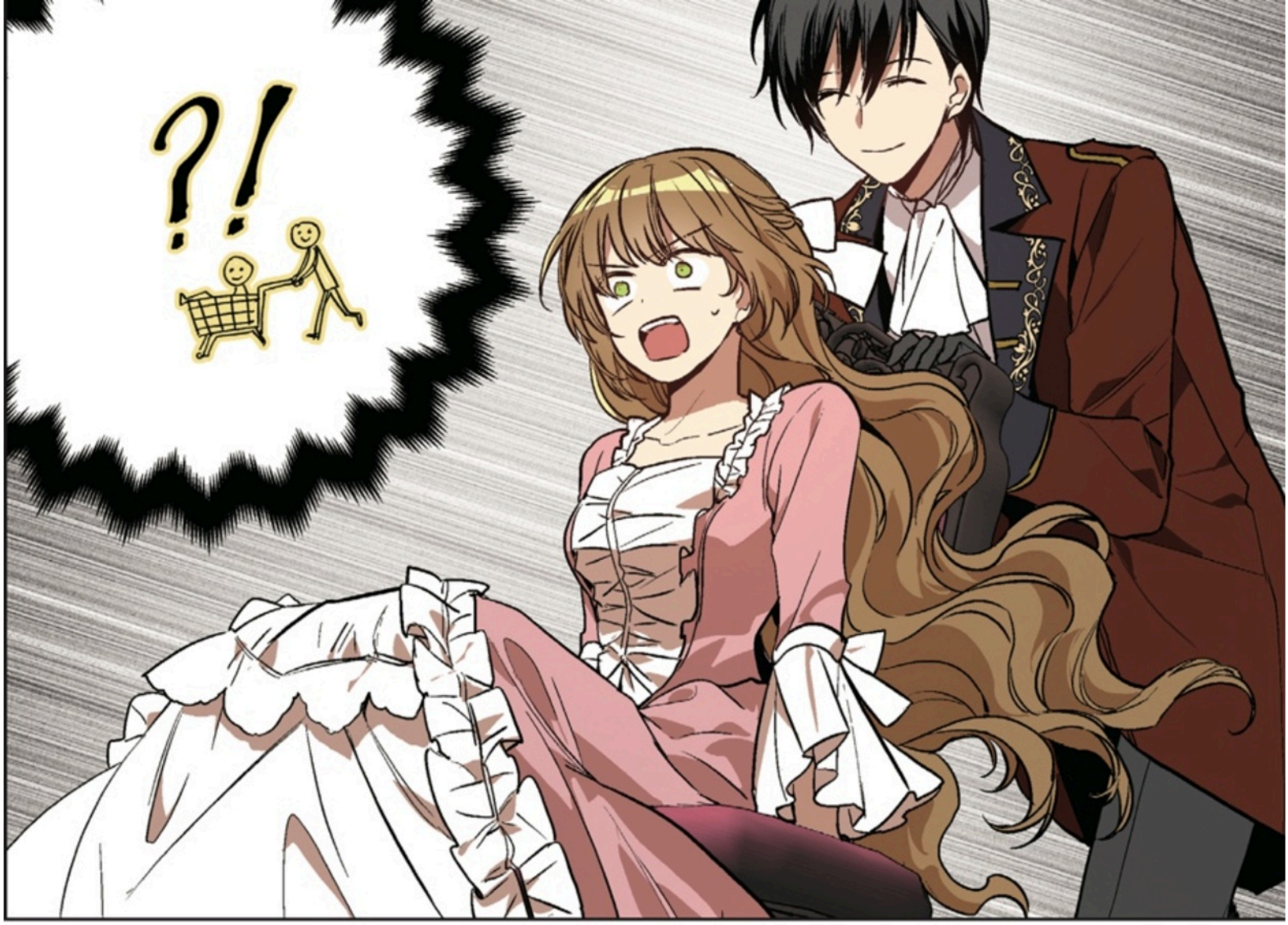

INFORM GRACE OF OUR ARRIVAL.

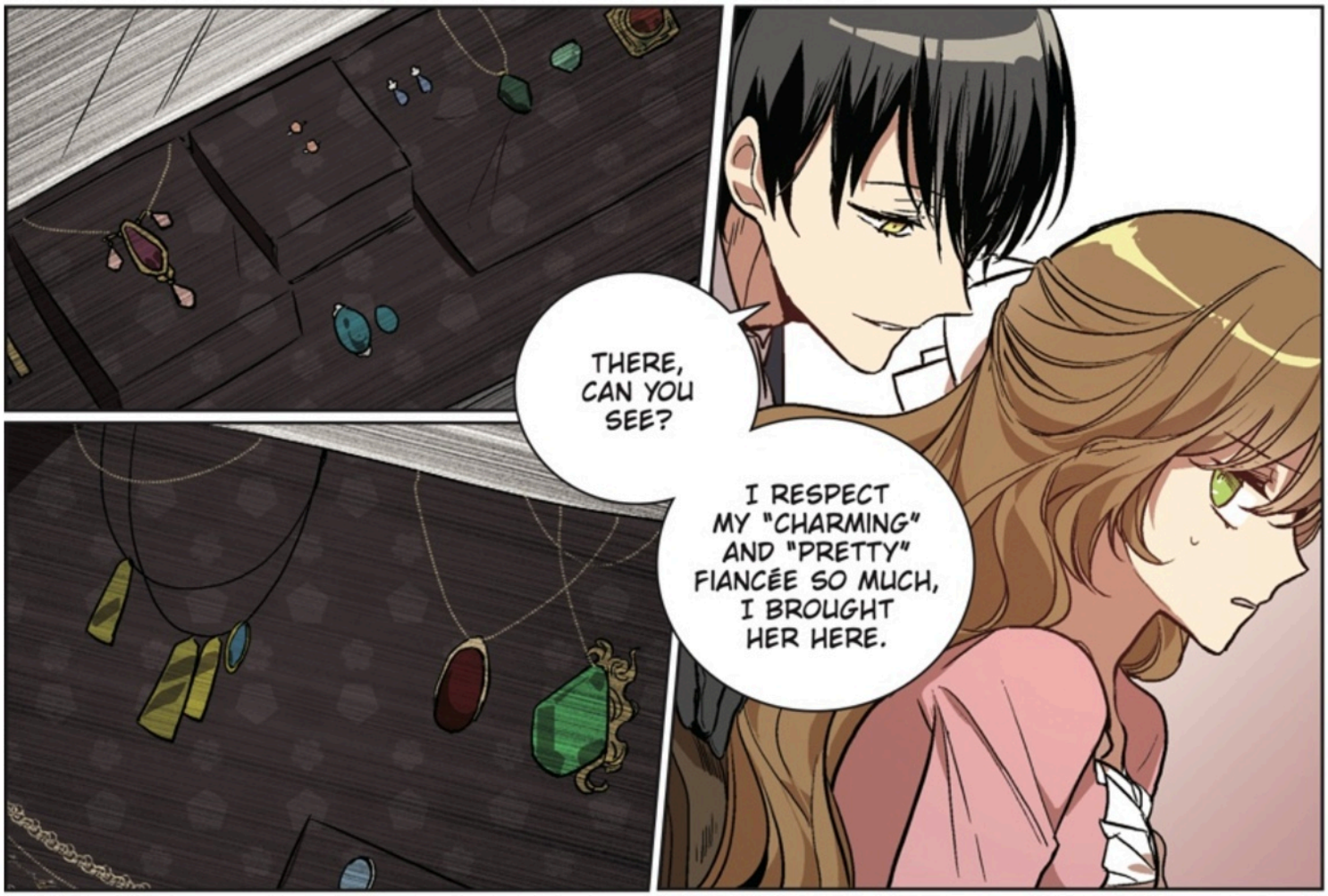

LET'S TAKE THIS CHANCE...

...TO DISPOSE OF ANY JEWELS OF UNKNOWN ORIGIN.


WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
I HAPPEN TO HAVE A FIANCÉE, YOU SEE.
RIGHT— CHARMING, REAL PRETTY. I KNOW THE ONE.
YES, BUT THAT "CHARMING" AND "PRETTY" WOMAN LACKS BOTH COMMON SENSE AND DISCERNING JUDGMENT, AND IS PRONE TO ADORNING HERSELF WITH ANYTHING IN FRONT OF HER.
YOU'RE SERIOUSLY GONNA PUT THAT ON ME, PAL?
DESPITE WARNINGS AGAINST DOING SO, EVEN.
DUKE WYNKNIGHT.


I, TOO... HAPPEN TO HAVE A FIANCÉ.
AH, THAT EXCEEDINGLY HANDSOME FELLOW?
THIS KINDA HANDSOME MAN LACKS BOTH RESPECT AND DECENCY FOR HIS OWN FIANCÉE...
...AND IS PRONE TO SHOOTING HIS MOUTH OFF ABOUT ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING.
DESPITE WARNINGS AGAINST DOING SO, EVEN.
SHFT
GRIP
RAELIANA.

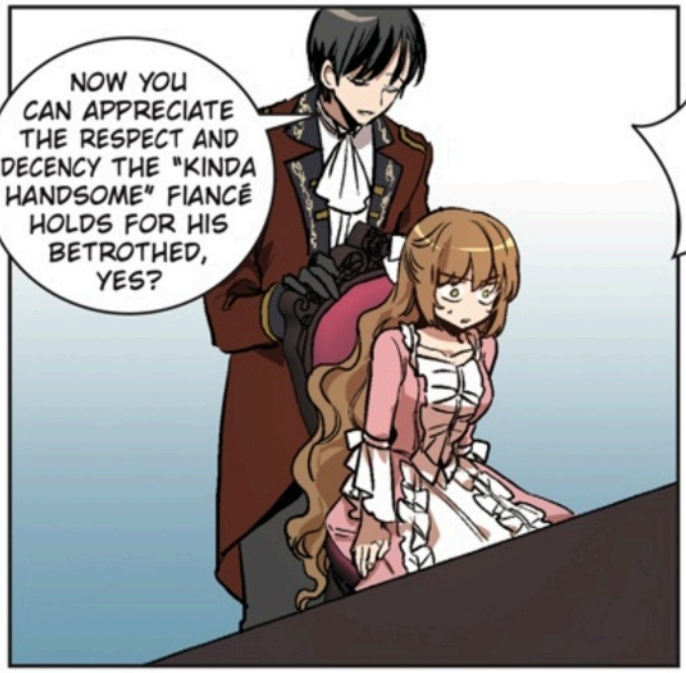

?!


THERE, CAN YOU SEE?
I RESPECT MY "CHARMING" AND "PRETTY" FIANCÉE SO MUCH, I BROUGHT HER HERE.

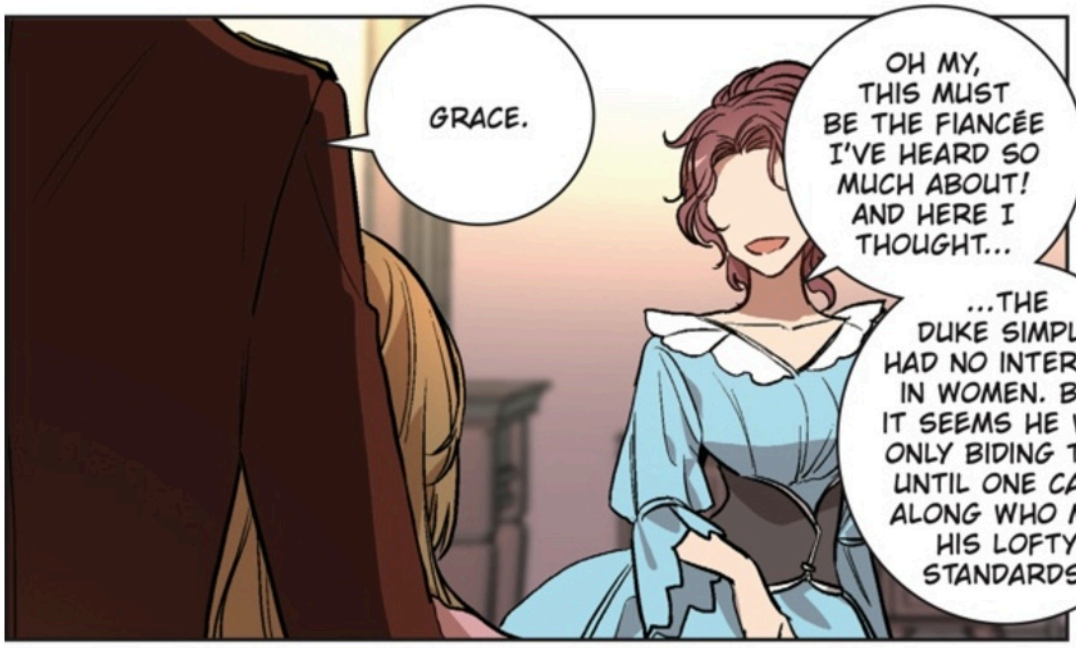
I KNOW I WAS AWAY FOR A WHILE ON A MISSION, BUT WHO IN THE WORLD IS THAT MAN...?

HE'S THE DUKE. NOT AN IMPOSTOR, NOR UNDER THE EFFECT OF ANY DRUG.

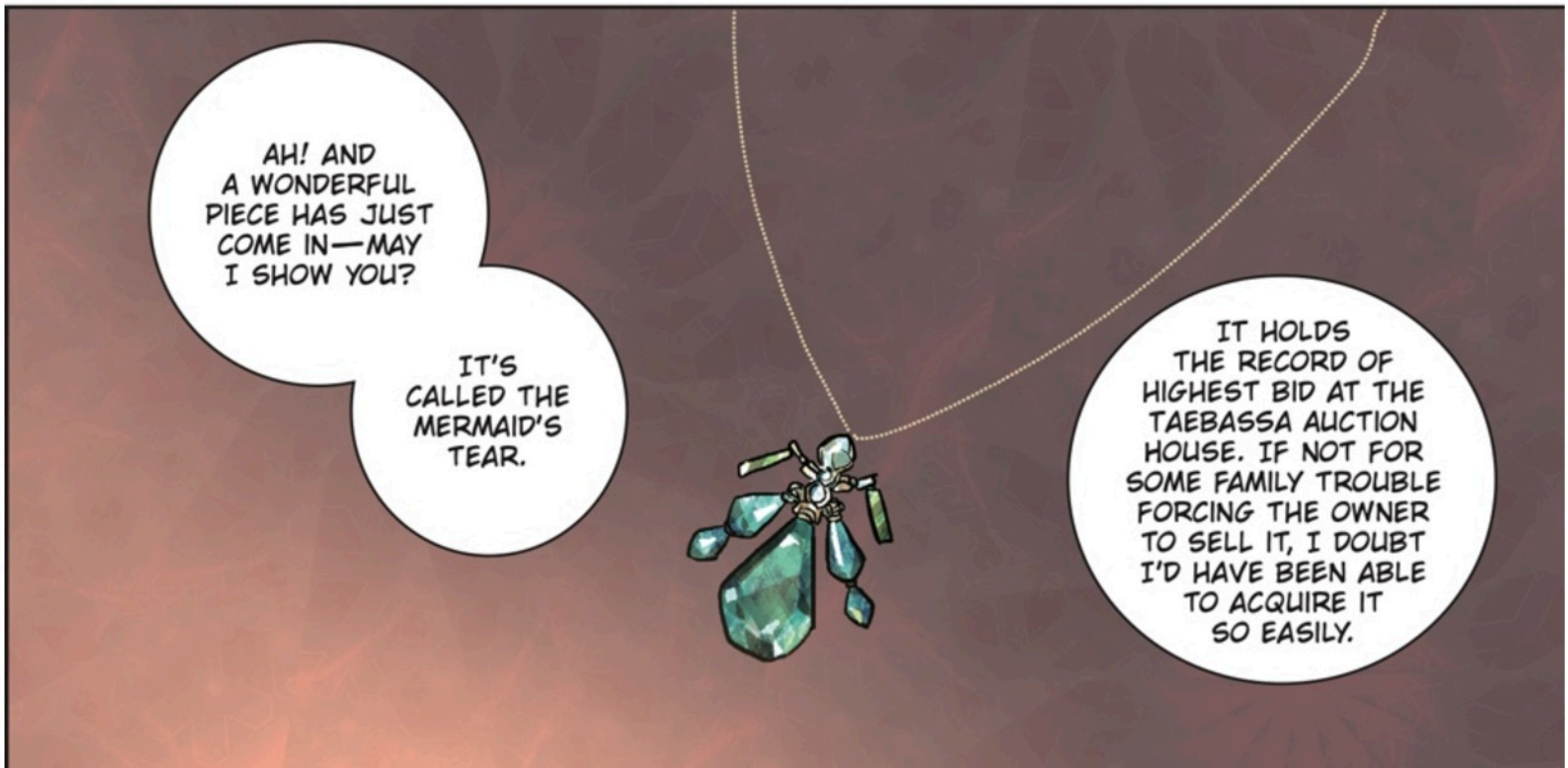
FOR REAL?!

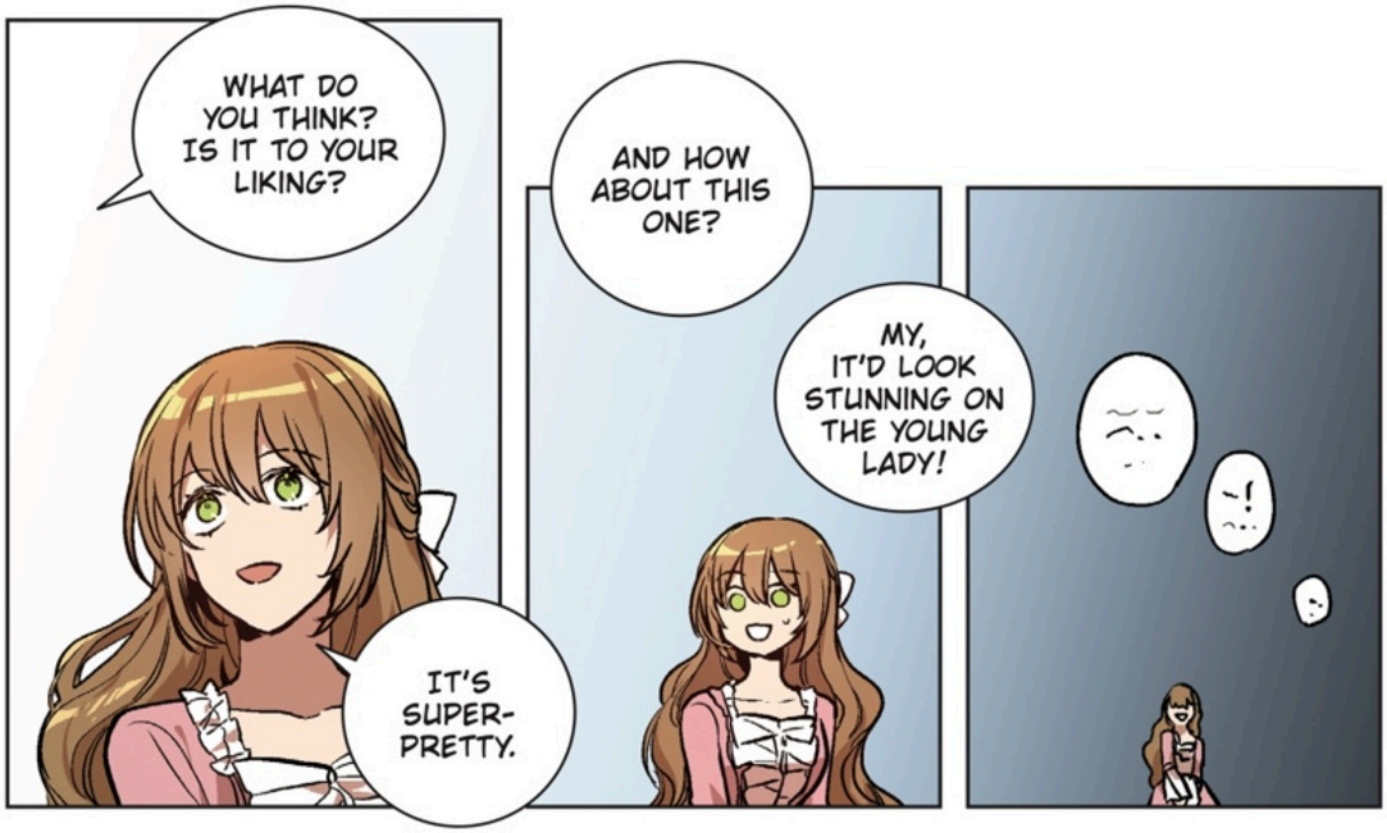

NOW YOU CAN APPRECIATE THE RESPECT AND DECENCY THE "KINDA HANDSOME" FIANCÉ HOLDS FOR HIS BETROTHED, YES?

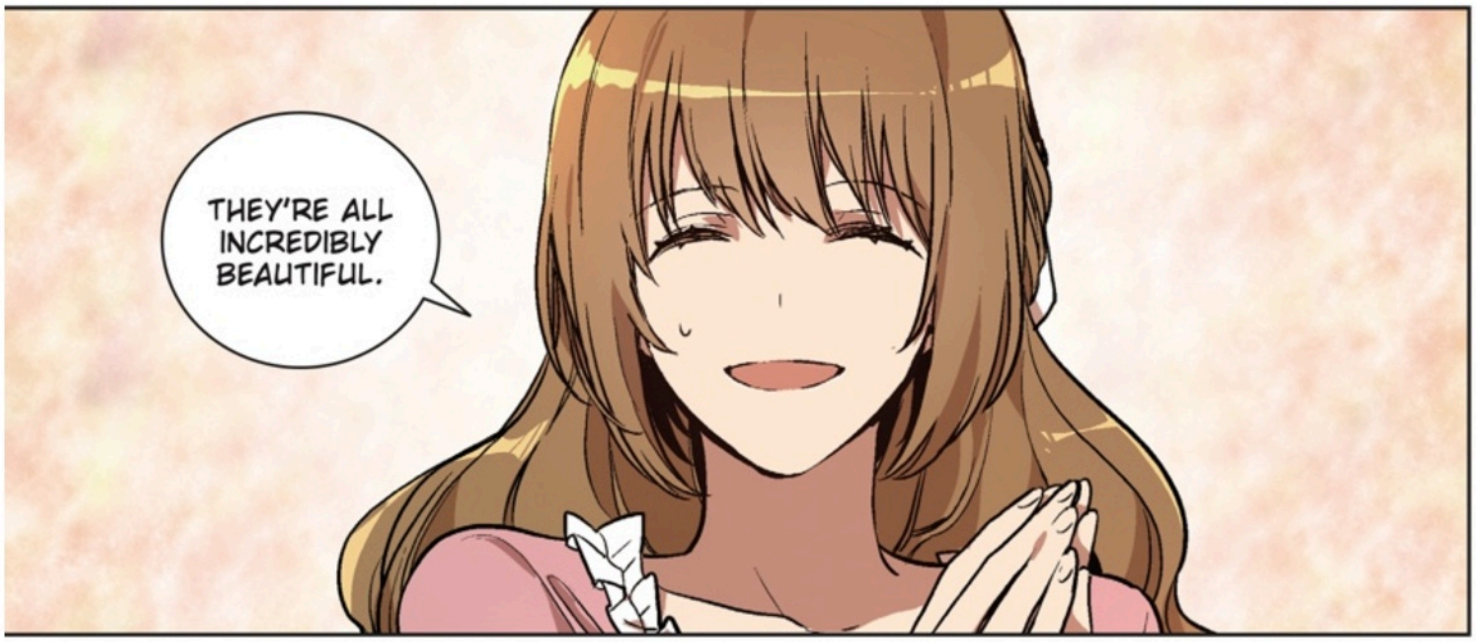
HEY—
IS THAT YOU, DUKE WYNKNIGHT?


GRACE.
OH MY, THIS MUST BE THE FIANCÉE I'VE HEARD SO MUCH ABOUT! AND HERE I THOUGHT...
...THE DUKE SIMPLY HAD NO INTEREST IN WOMEN. BUT IT SEEMS HE WAS ONLY BIDING TIME UNTIL ONE CAME ALONG WHO MET HIS LOFTY STANDARDS.

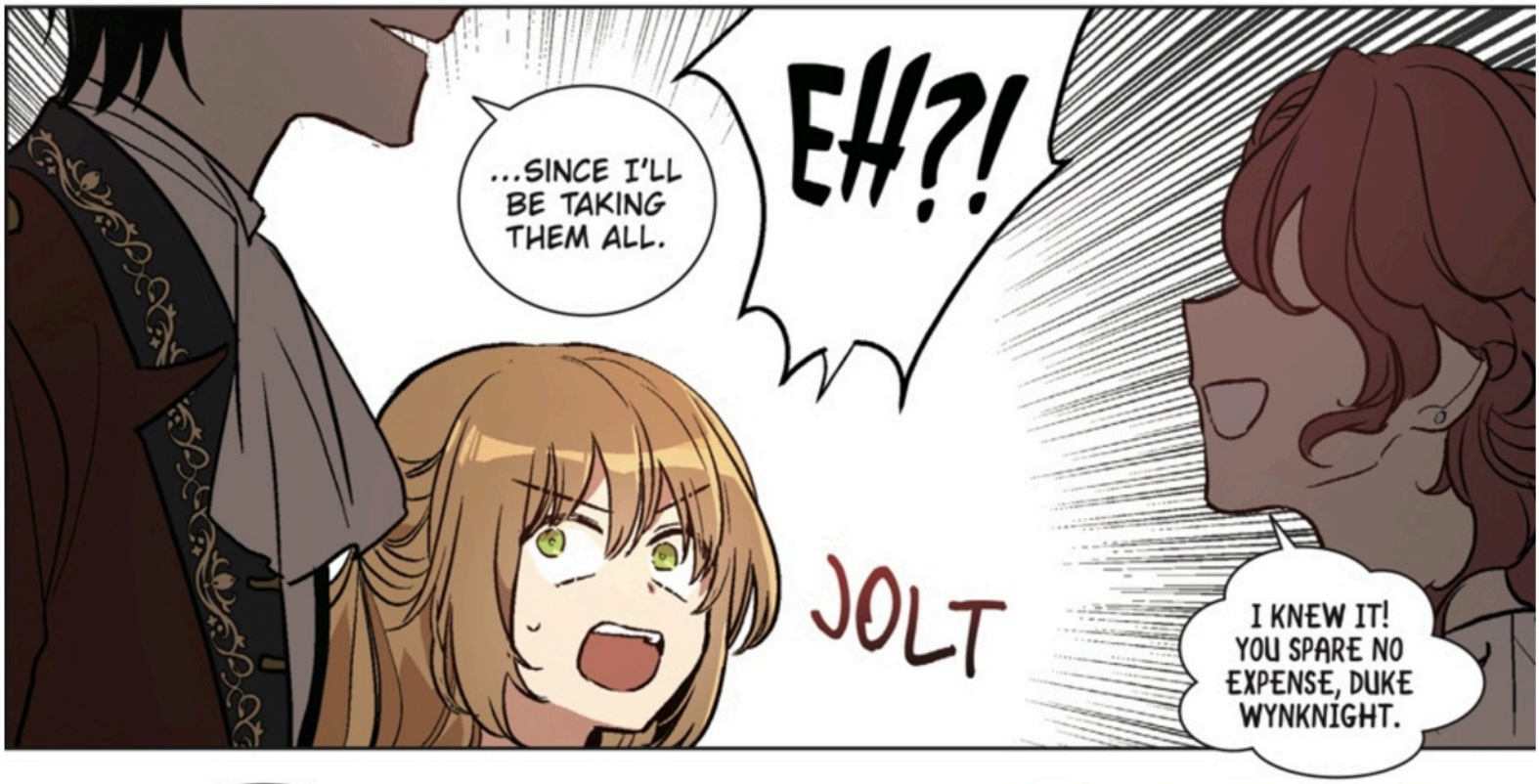
CRINGE
UH...

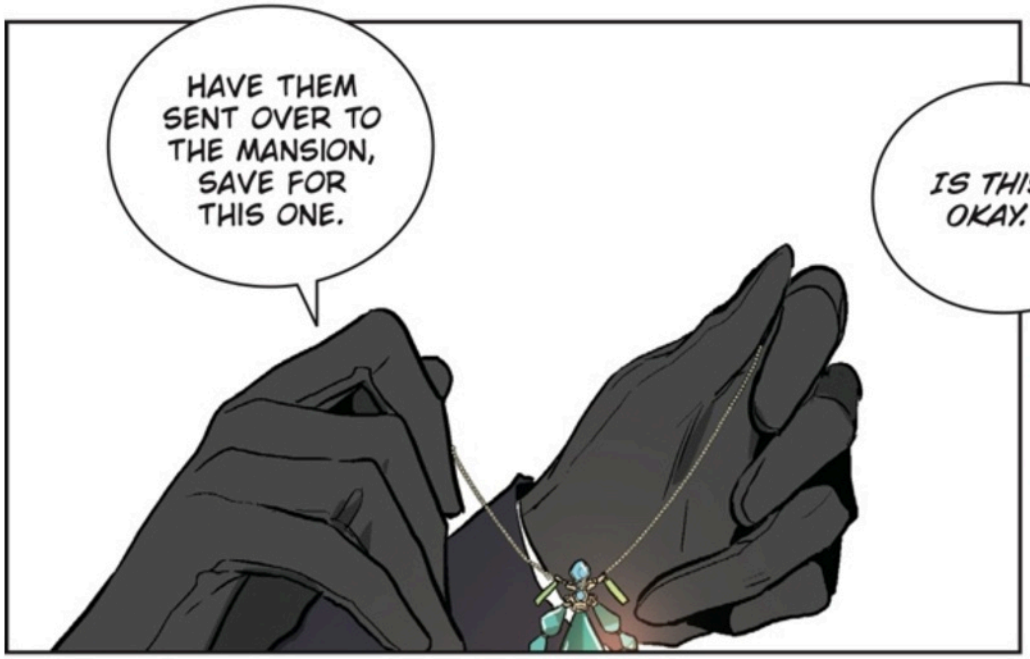

AH! AND A WONDERFUL PIECE HAS JUST COME IN—MAY I SHOW YOU?
IT'S CALLED THE MERMAID'S TEAR.
IT HOLDS THE RECORD OF HIGHEST BID AT THE TAEBASSA AUCTION HOUSE. IF NOT FOR SOME FAMILY TROUBLE FORCING THE OWNER TO SELL IT, I DOUBT I'D HAVE BEEN ABLE TO ACQUIRE IT SO EASILY.


WHAT DO YOU THINK? IS IT TO YOUR LIKING?
IT'S SUPER-PRETTY.
AND HOW ABOUT THIS ONE?
MY, IT'D LOOK STUNNING ON THE YOUNG LADY!


THEY'RE ALL INCREDIBLY BEAUTIFUL.

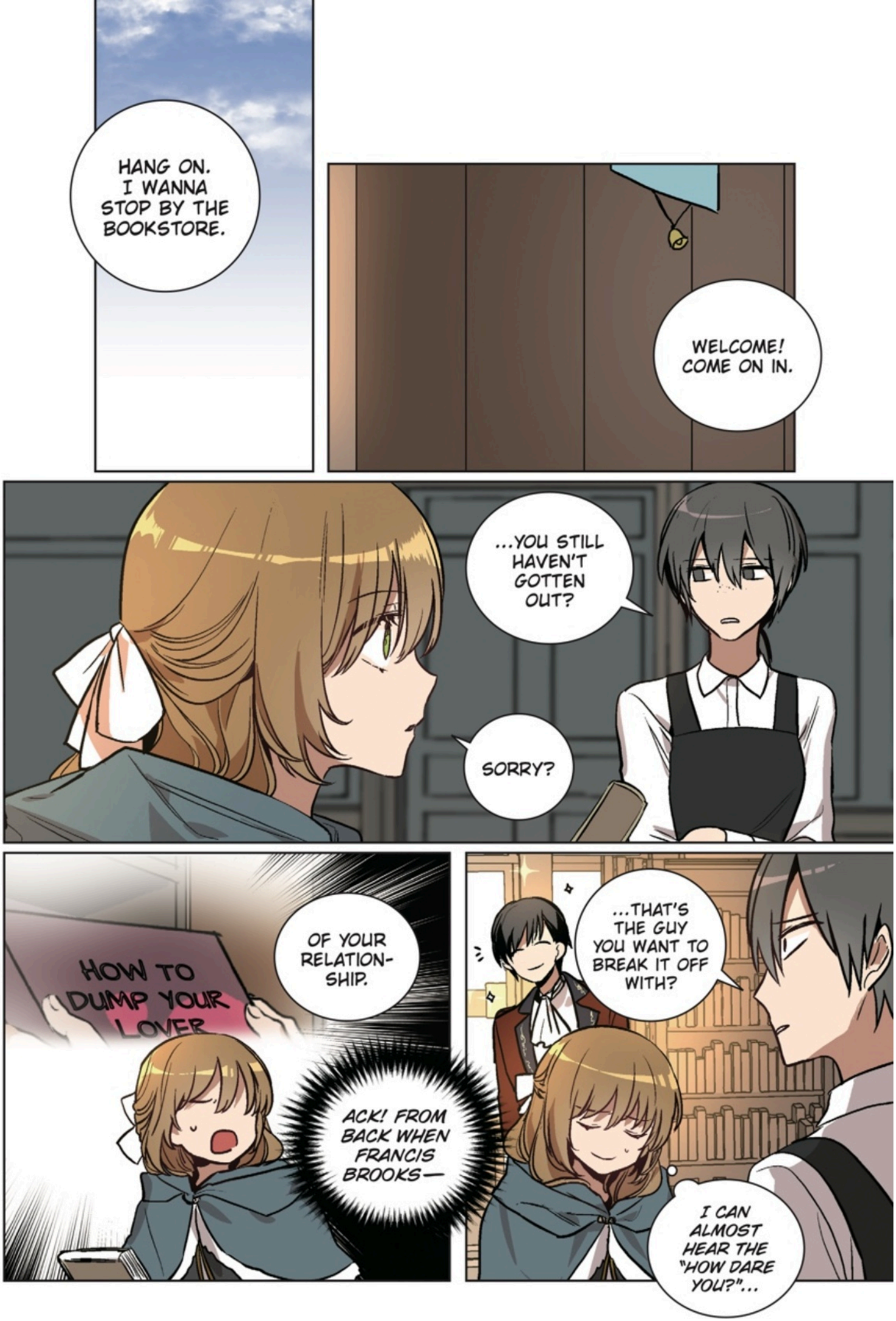
I'M GLAD TO HEAR THAT...

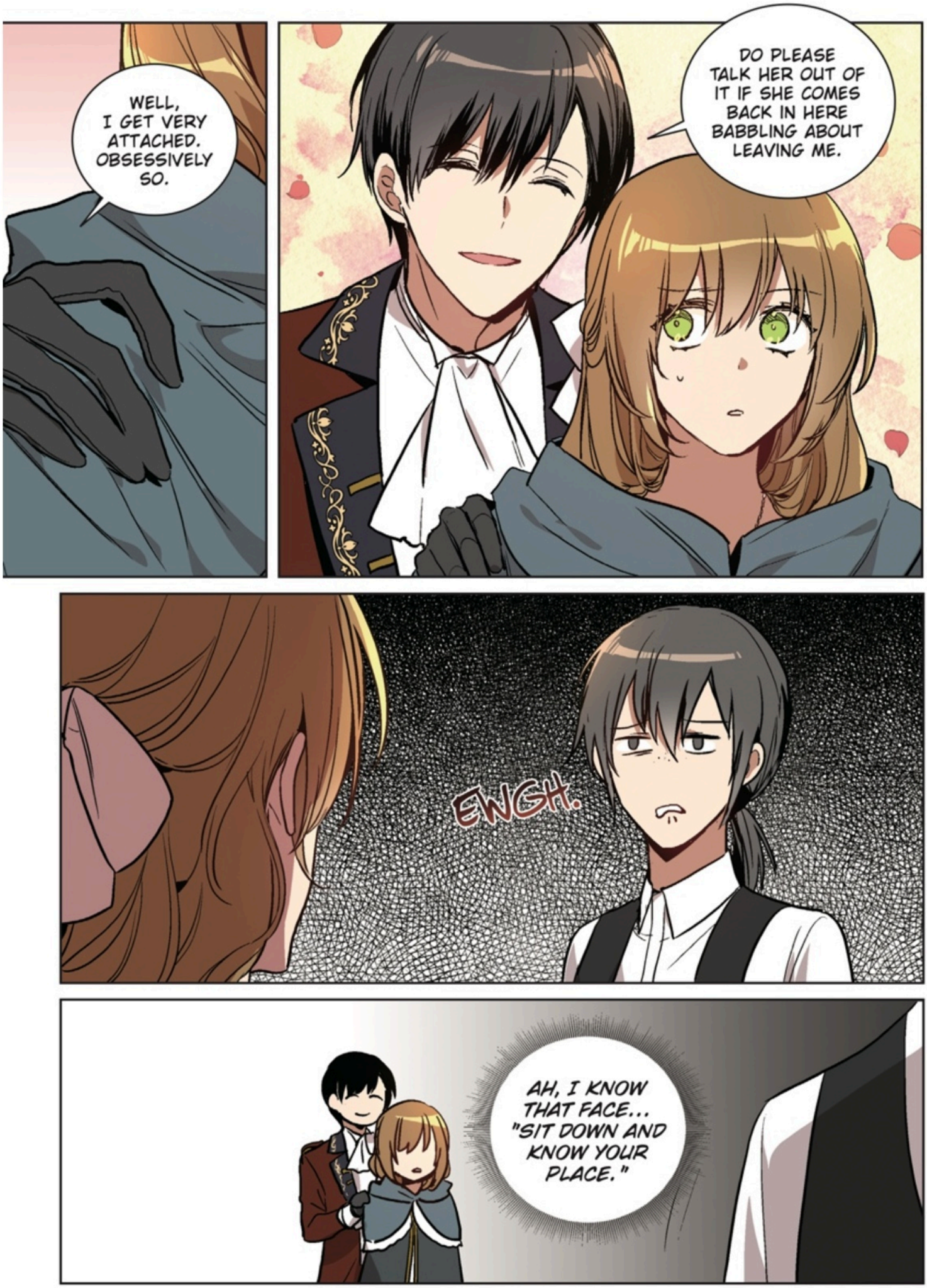

...SINCE I'LL BE TAKING THEM ALL.
EH?!
JOLT
I KNEW IT! YOU SPARE NO EXPENSE, DUKE WYNKNIGHT.


HAVE THEM SENT OVER TO THE MANSION, SAVE FOR THIS ONE.

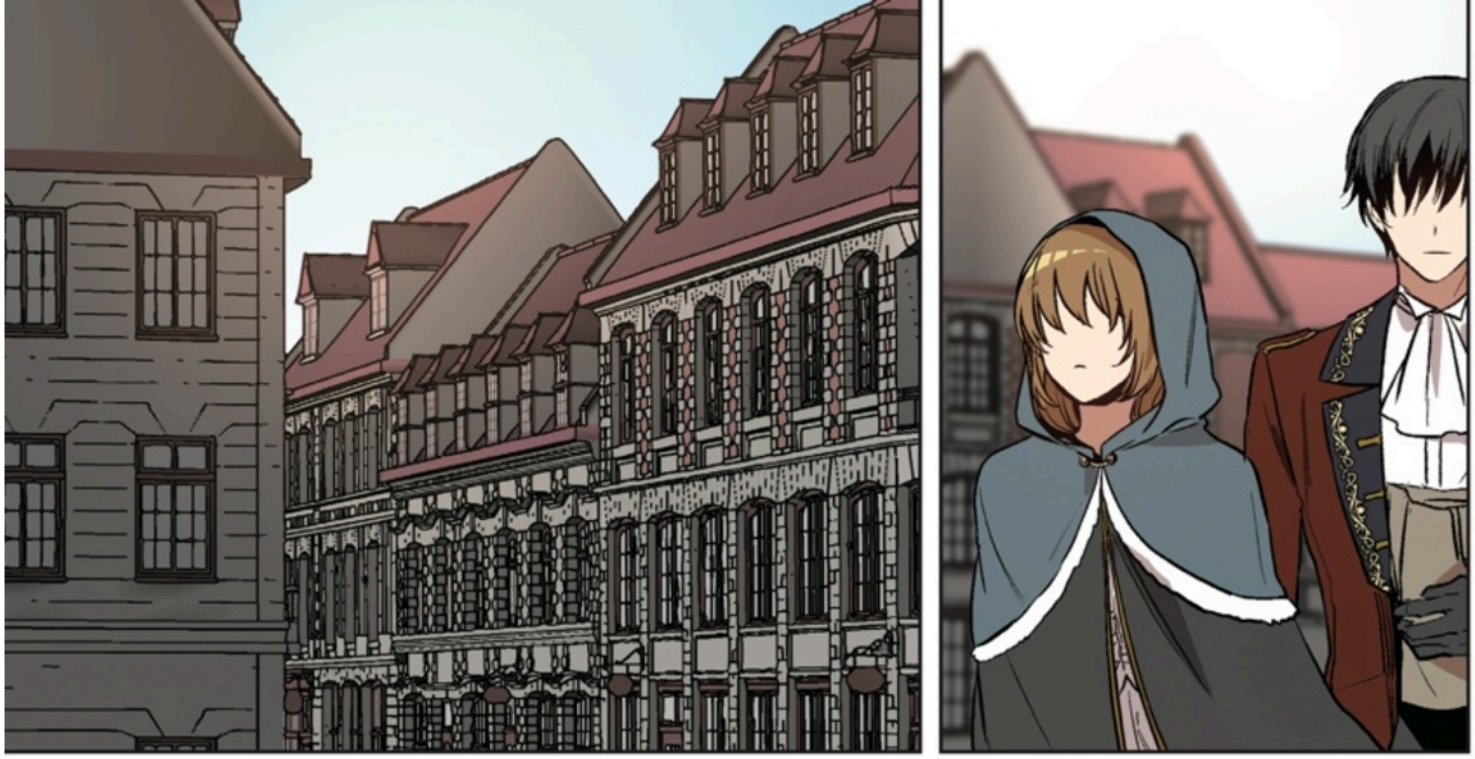
IS THIS... OKAY...?

...LET'S JUST NOT THINK TOO MUCH ABOUT IT.

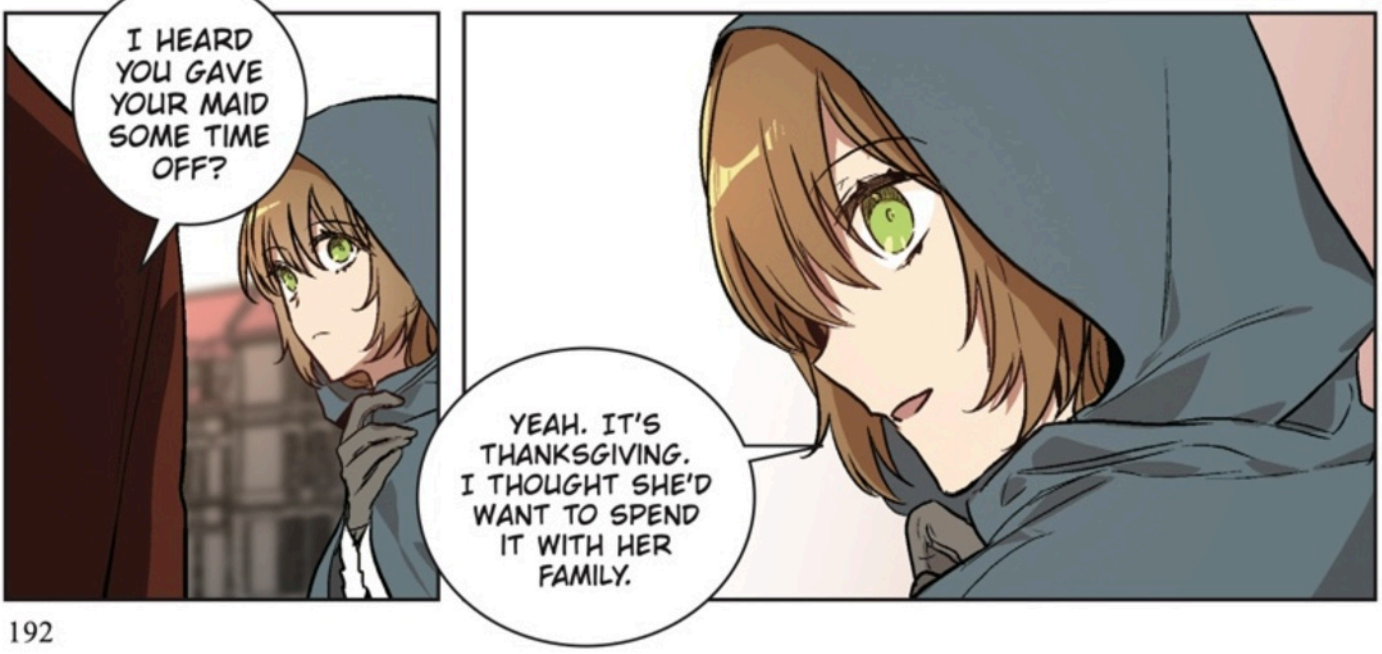

HANG ON. I WANNA STOP BY THE BOOKSTORE.
WELCOME! COME ON IN.
...YOU STILL HAVEN'T GOTTEN OUT?
SORRY?
HOW TO DUMP YOUR LOVER
OF YOUR RELATION-SHIP.
ACK! FROM BACK WHEN FRANCIS BROOKS—
...THAT'S THE GUY YOU WANT TO BREAK IT OFF WITH?
I CAN ALMOST HEAR THE "HOW DARE YOU?"...

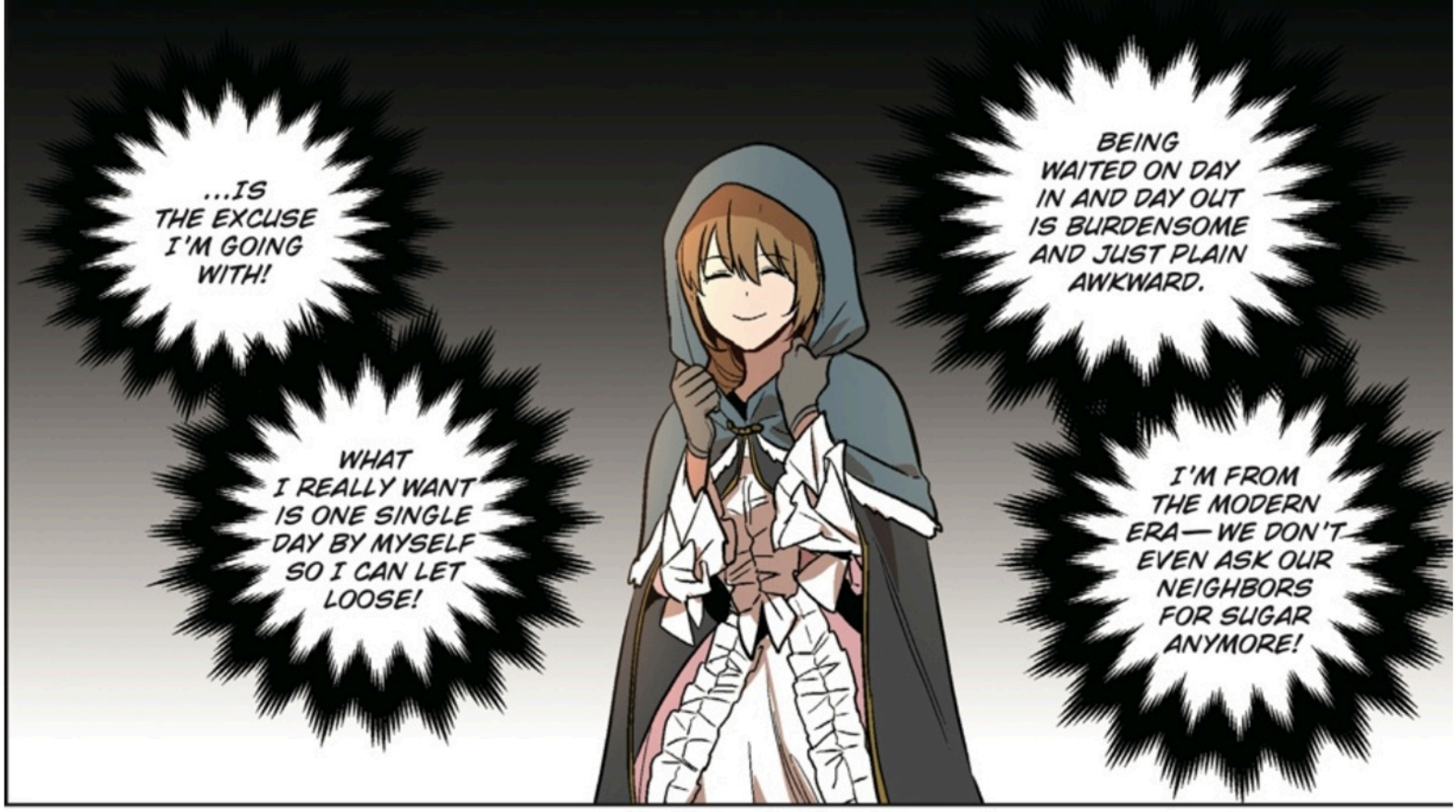

WELL, I GET VERY ATTACHED. OBSESSIVELY SO.
DO PLEASE TALK HER OUT OF IT IF SHE COMES BACK IN HERE BABBLING ABOUT LEAVING ME.
EWGH.
AH, I KNOW THAT FACE... "SIT DOWN AND KNOW YOUR PLACE."

...I GET TOO ATTACHED.



YOU'RE NOT TIRED?
SHF
WE'VE BARELY EVEN WALKED.


I HEARD YOU GAVE YOUR MAID SOME TIME OFF?
YEAH. IT'S THANKSGIVING. I THOUGHT SHE'D WANT TO SPEND IT WITH HER FAMILY.


...IS THE EXCUSE I'M GOING WITH!
BEING WAITED ON DAY IN AND DAY OUT IS BURDENSOME AND JUST PLAIN AWKWARD.
WHAT I REALLY WANT IS ONE SINGLE DAY BY MYSELF SO I CAN LET LOOSE!
I'M FROM THE MODERN ERA— WE DON'T EVEN ASK OUR NEIGHBORS FOR SUGAR ANYMORE!

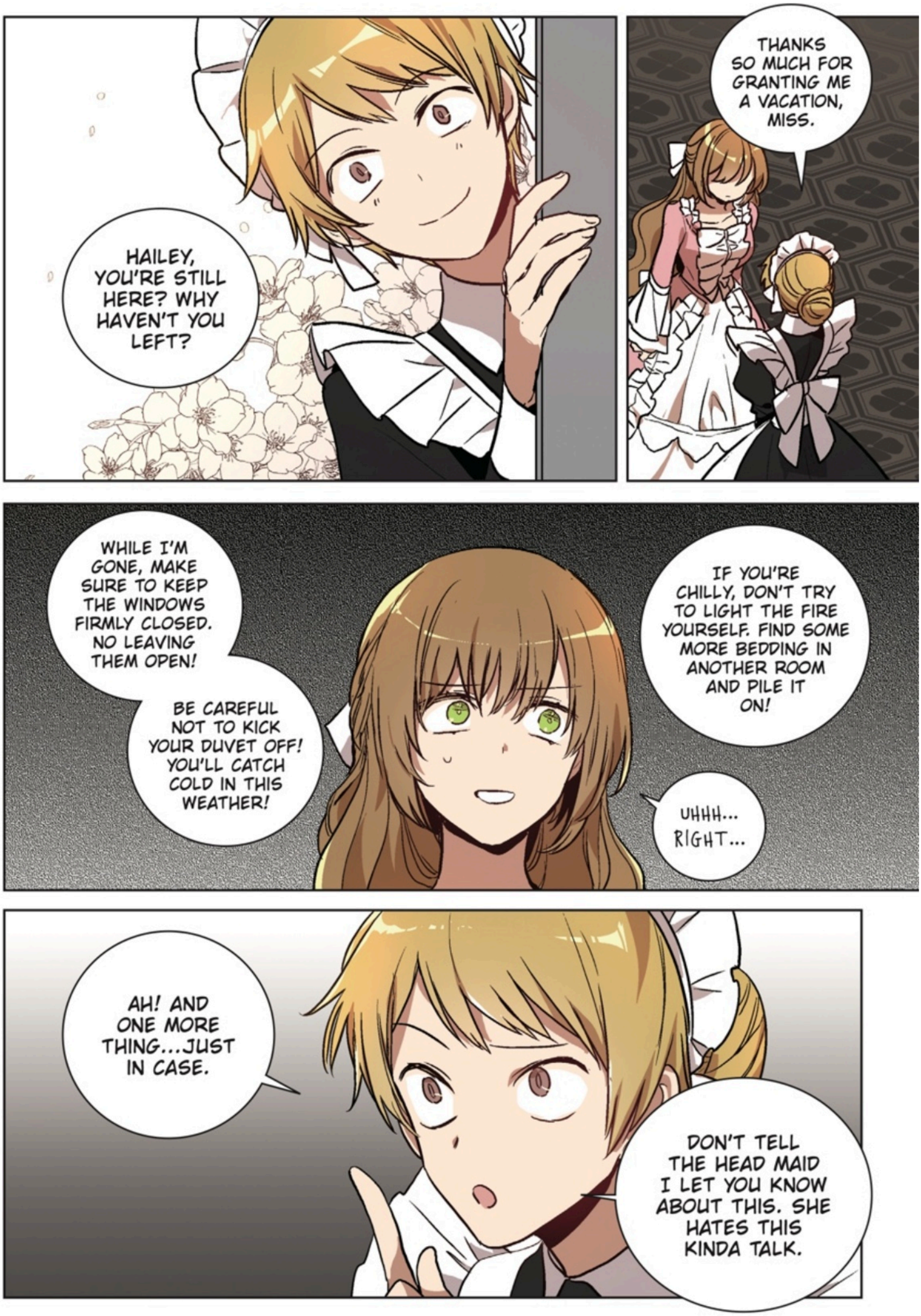
MASTER, A MESSAGE FROM THE ESTATE...

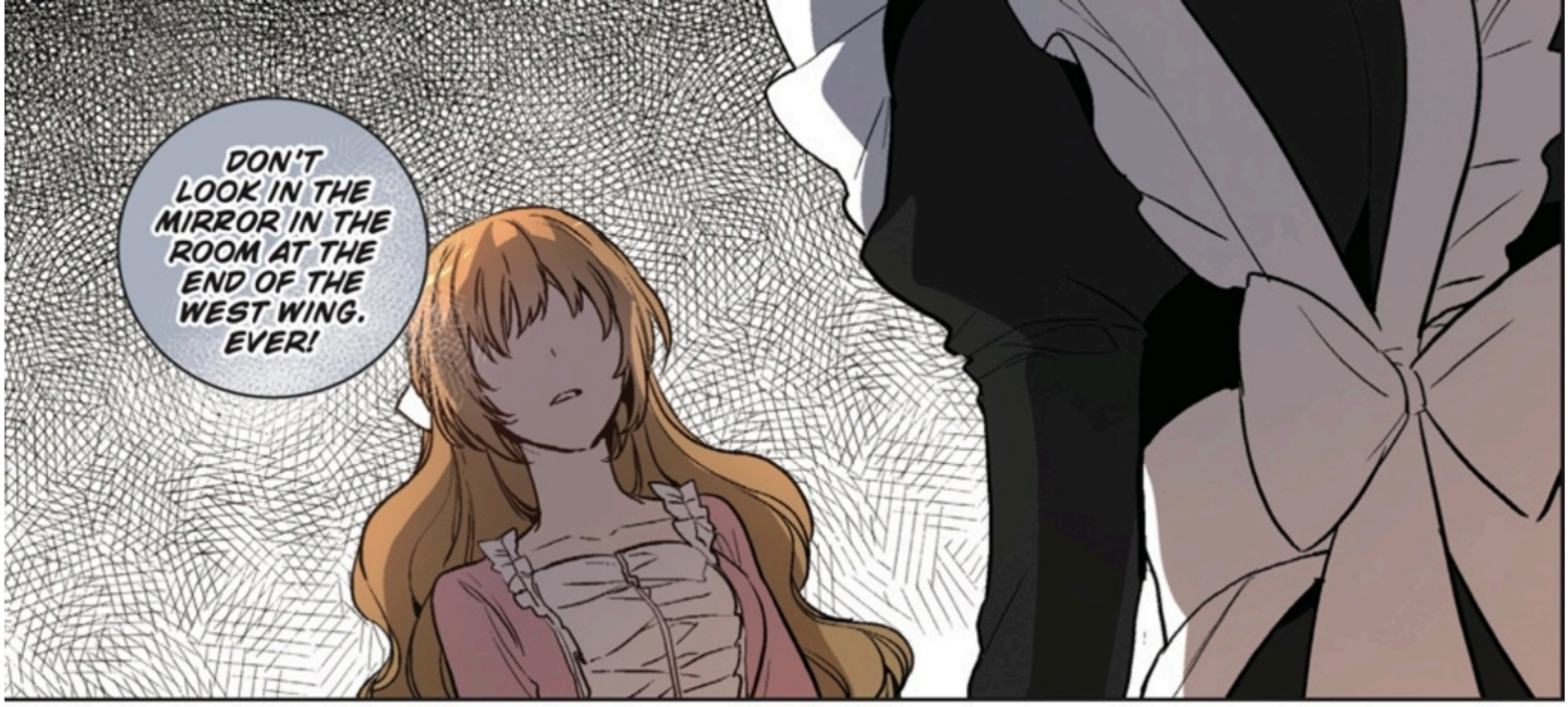
WHISPER
...I SEE.

WHY DON'T YOU HAVE HAILEY—
I'LL BE FINE.
...THEN, WHITTON, ANSLEY.

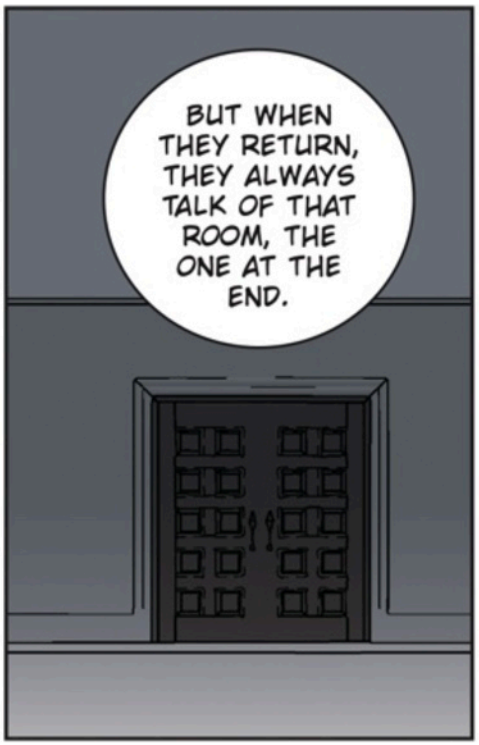
SEE THE LADY BACK TO HER ROOM.

KNOCK KNOCK
MISS.


HAILEY, YOU'RE STILL HERE? WHY HAVEN'T YOU LEFT?
THANKS SO MUCH FOR GRANTING ME A VACATION, MISS.
WHILE I'M GONE, MAKE SURE TO KEEP THE WINDOWS FIRMLY CLOSED. NO LEAVING THEM OPEN!
BE CAREFUL NOT TO KICK YOUR DUVET OFF! YOU'LL CATCH COLD IN THIS WEATHER!
IF YOU'RE CHILLY, DON'T TRY TO LIGHT THE FIRE YOURSELF. FIND SOME MORE BEDDING IN ANOTHER ROOM AND PILE IT ON!
UHHH... RIGHT...
AH! AND ONE MORE THING...JUST IN CASE.
DON'T TELL THE HEAD MAID I LET YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS. SHE HATES THIS KINDA TALK.

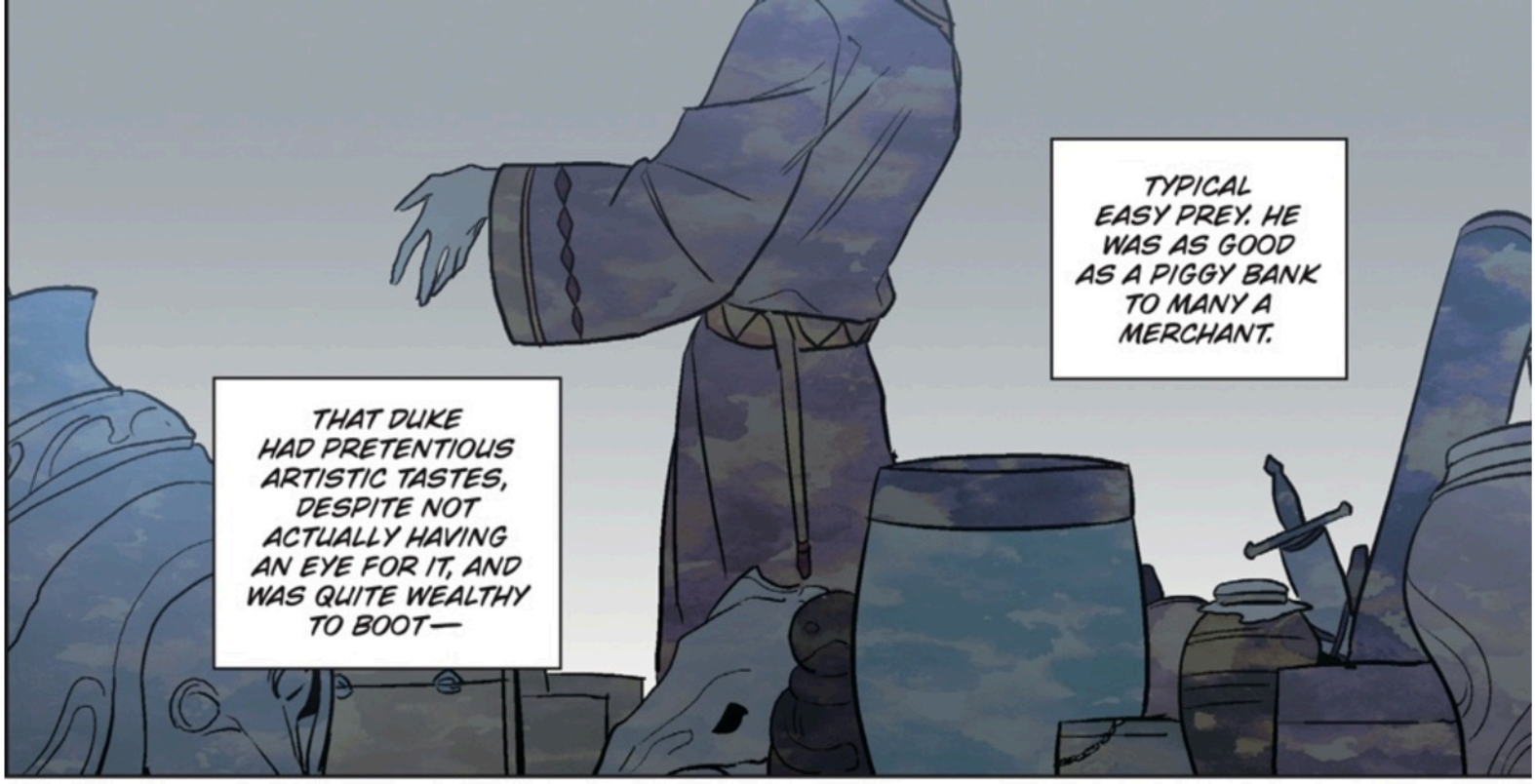

DON'T LOOK IN THE MIRROR IN THE ROOM AT THE END OF THE WEST WING. EVER!

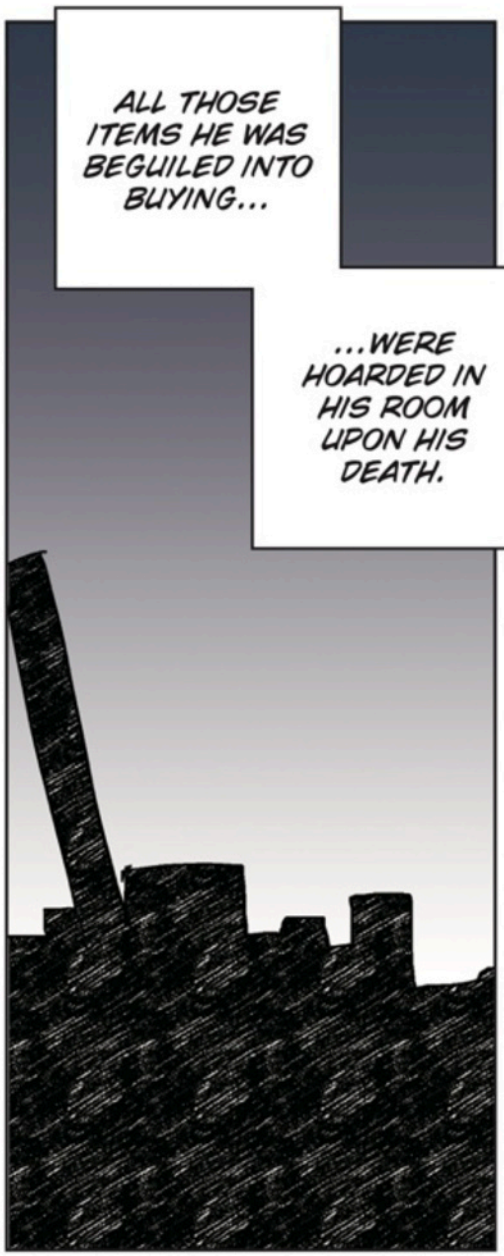
...HOW COME?
EACH THANKSGIVING, THE MAIDS TAKE TURNS WITH THE WEST WING.

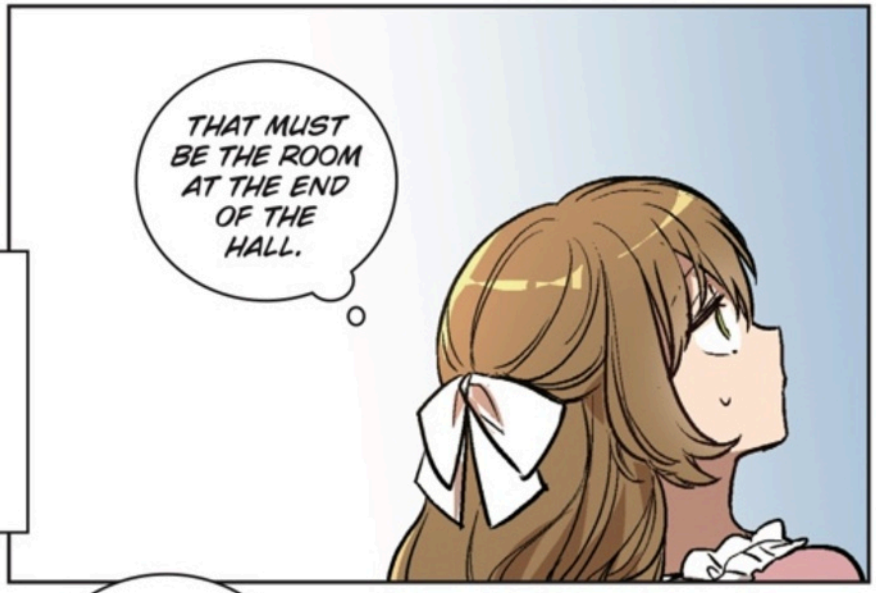

BUT WHEN THEY RETURN, THEY ALWAYS TALK OF THAT ROOM, THE ONE AT THE END.

AT THE END...?

YUP. TWO GENERATIONS AGO, THE THEN DUKE WYNKNIGHT SPENT HIS FINAL DAYS THERE.

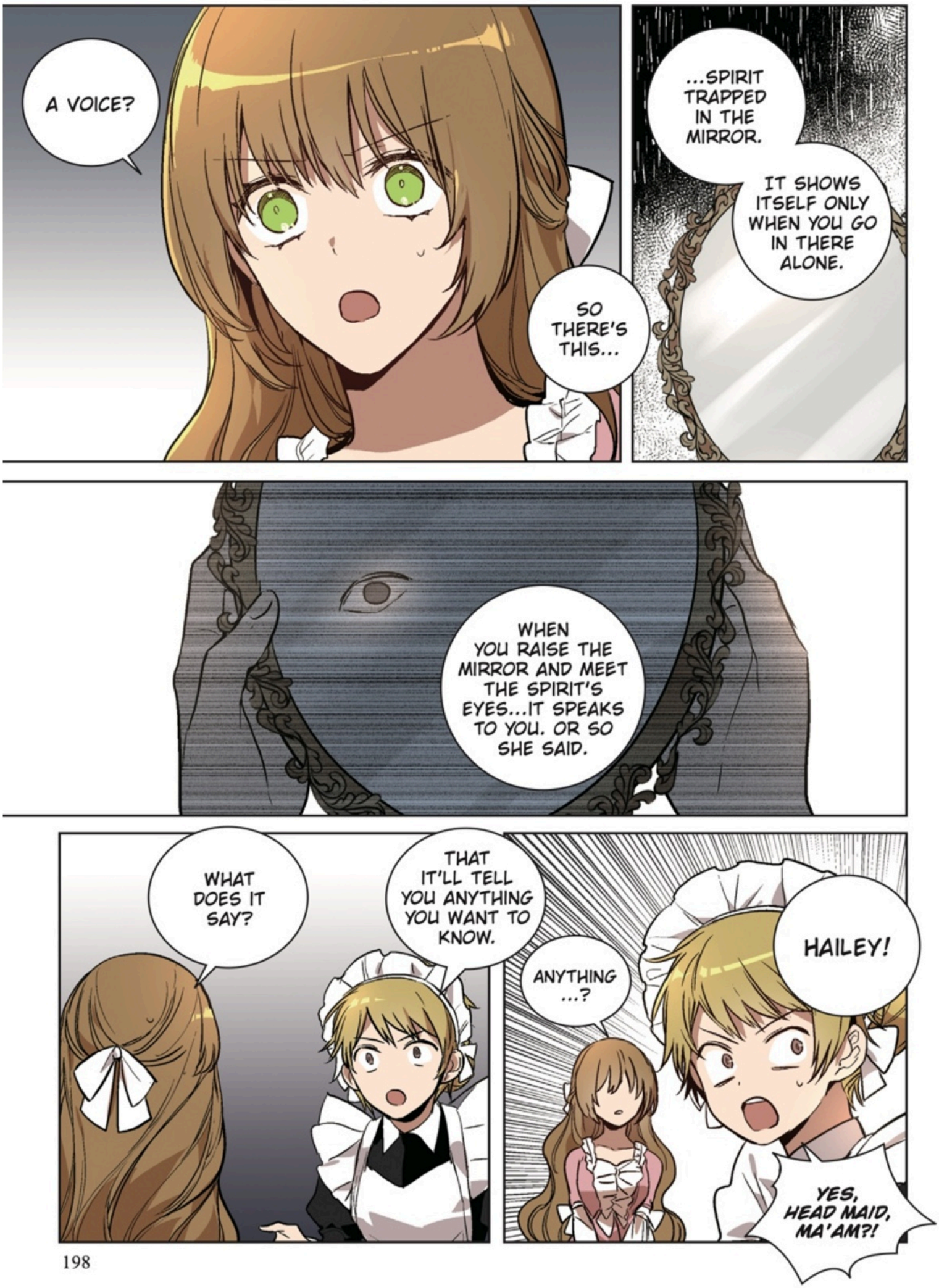

TYPICAL EASY PREY. HE WAS AS GOOD AS A PIGGY BANK TO MANY A MERCHANT.
THAT DUKE HAD PRETENTIOUS ARTISTIC TASTES, DESPITE NOT ACTUALLY HAVING AN EYE FOR IT, AND WAS QUITE WEALTHY TO BOOT—

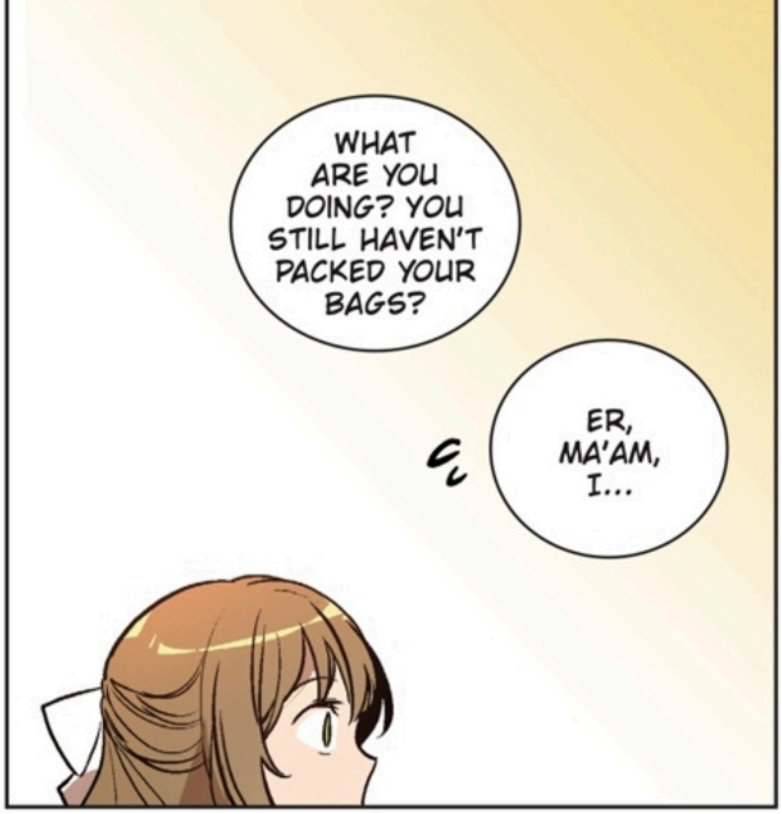

ALL THOSE ITEMS HE WAS BEGUILED INTO BUYING...
...WERE HOARDED IN HIS ROOM UPON HIS DEATH.


THAT MUST BE THE ROOM AT THE END OF THE HALL.

LAST YEAR, ONE OF THE GIRLS IN CHARGE OF CLEANING HAD SOMETHING LIKE A SENSE FOR THE MYSTIC.
WE WERE QUITE CLOSE, SO SHE TOLD ME ABOUT HER TIME IN DETAIL. IN THERE—

A VOICE SPEAKS TO YOU.

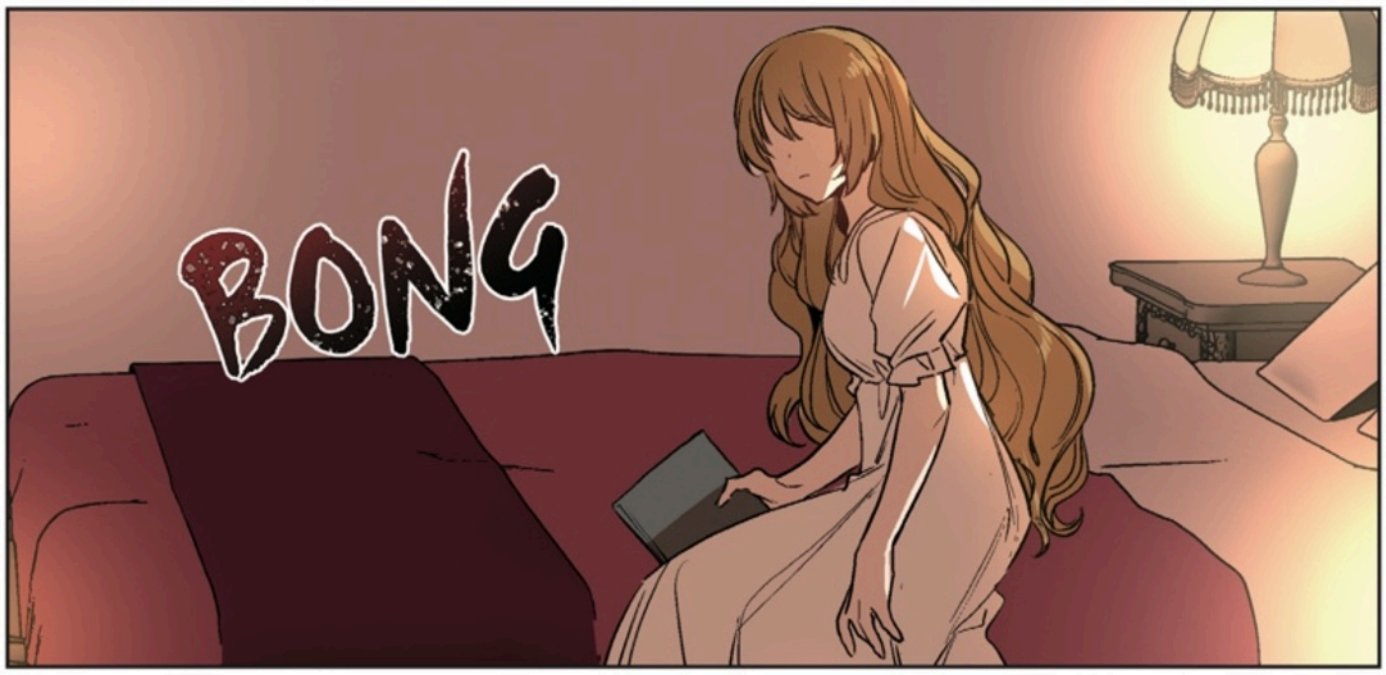

A VOICE?
SO THERE'S THIS...
...SPIRIT TRAPPED IN THE MIRROR.
IT SHOWS ITSELF ONLY WHEN YOU GO IN THERE ALONE.
WHEN YOU RAISE THE MIRROR AND MEET THE SPIRIT'S EYES...IT SPEAKS TO YOU. OR SO SHE SAID.
WHAT DOES IT SAY?
THAT IT'LL TELL YOU ANYTHING YOU WANT TO KNOW.
ANYTHING ...?
HAILEY!
YES, HEAD MAID, MA'AM?!

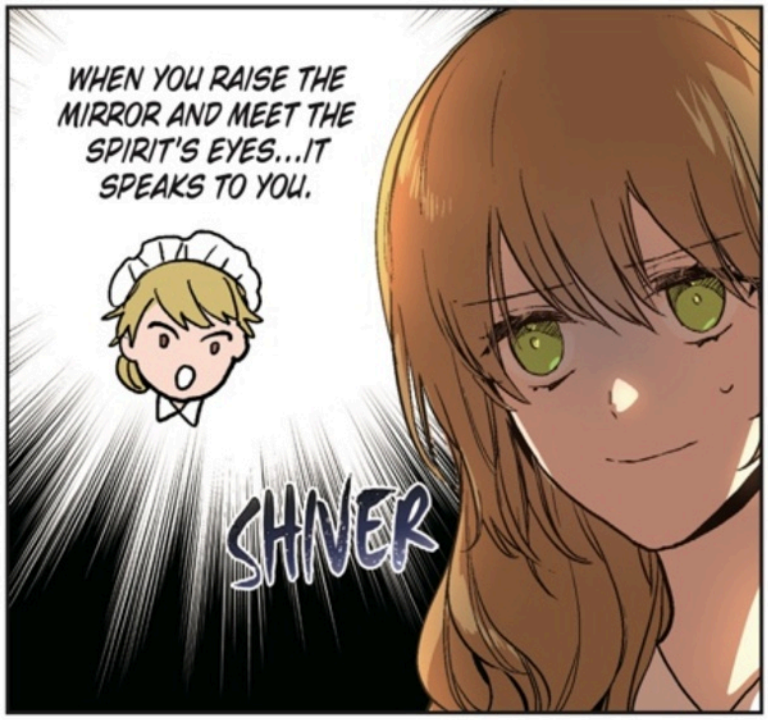

WHAT ARE YOU DOING? YOU STILL HAVEN'T PACKED YOUR BAGS?
ER, MA'AM, I...

CHILL

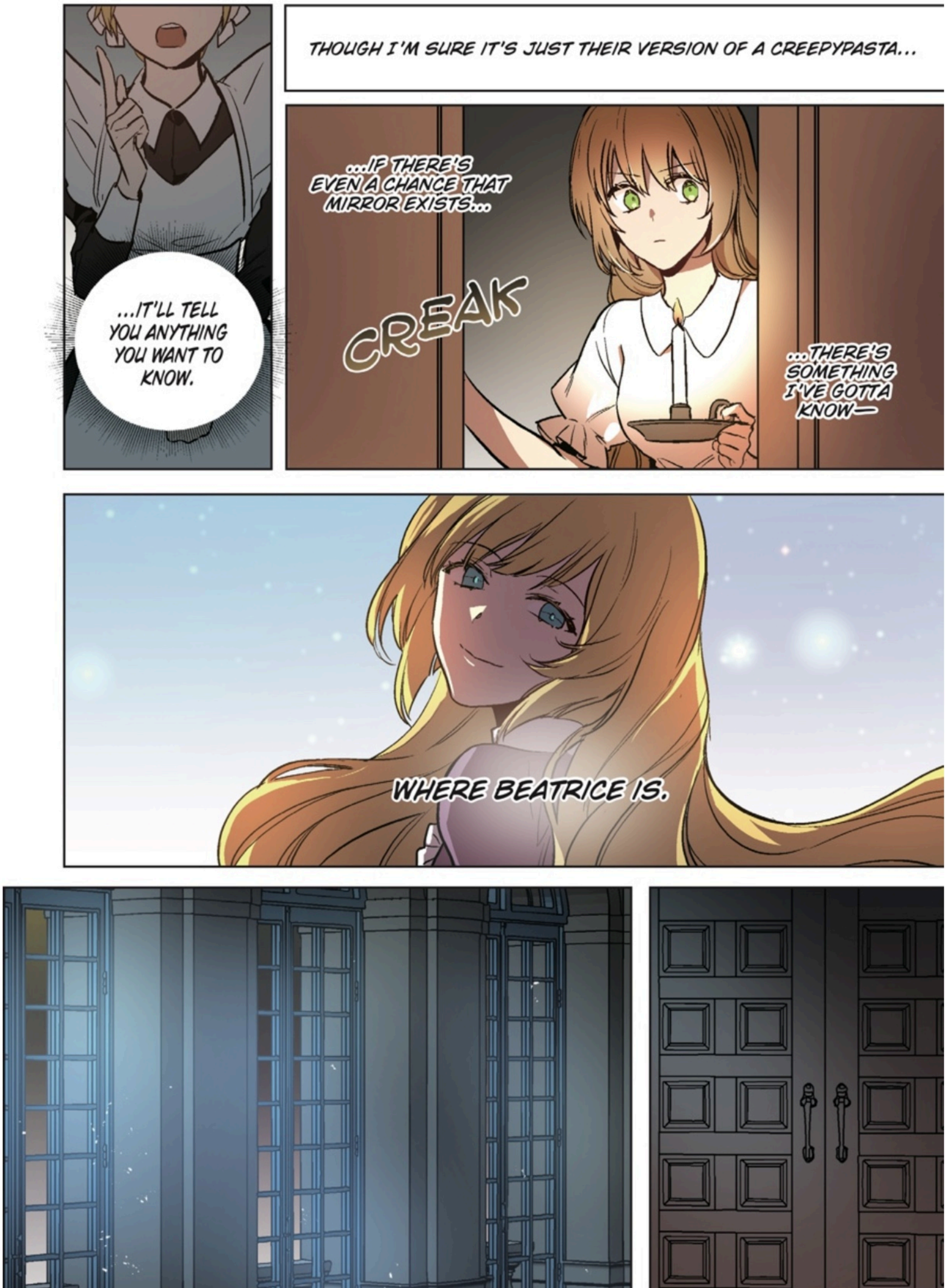
NO BONUS FOR YOU, HAILEY.

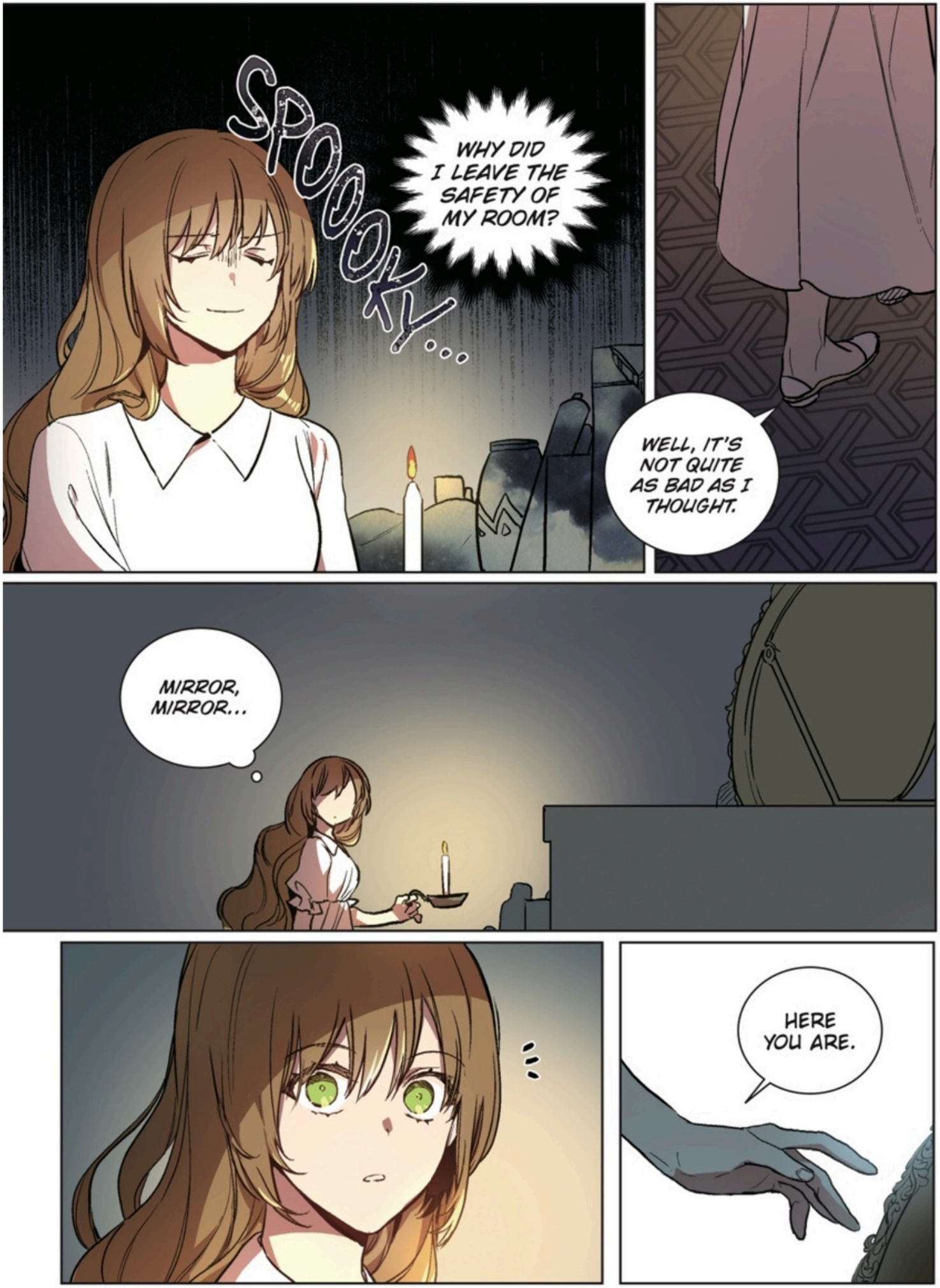
BONG
BONG

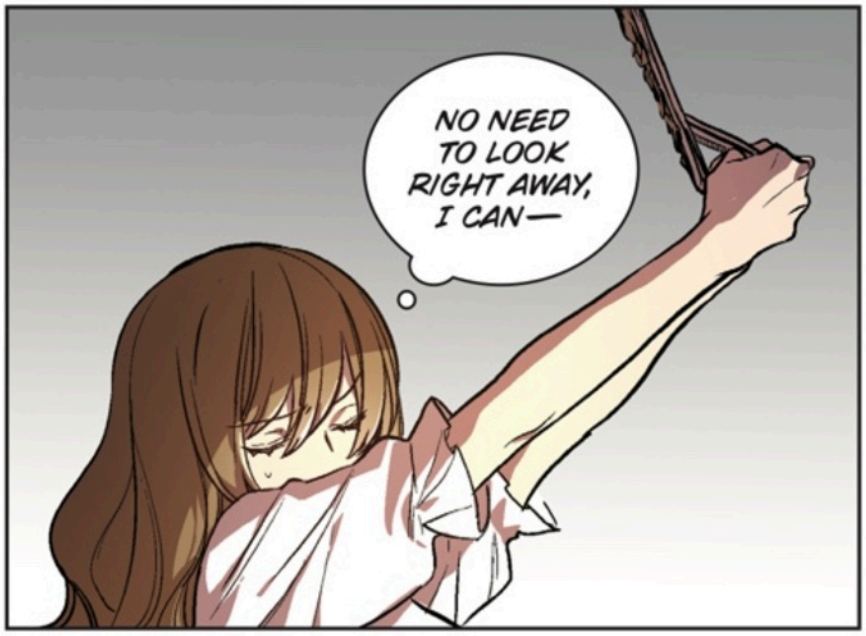

BONG


WHEN YOU RAISE THE MIRROR AND MEET THE SPIRIT'S EYES...IT SPEAKS TO YOU.
SHIVER

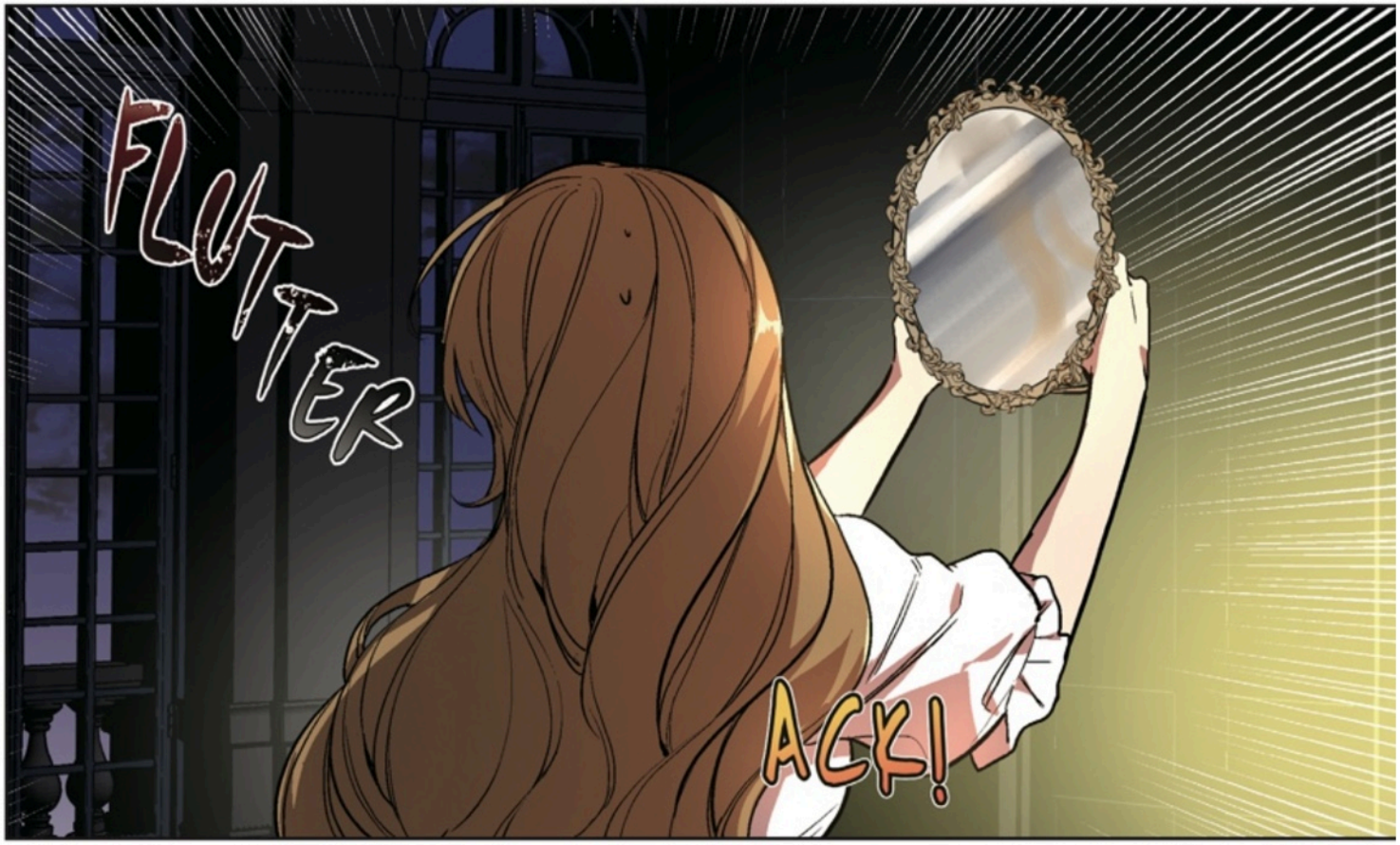
IT SOUNDS SCARY, BUT...

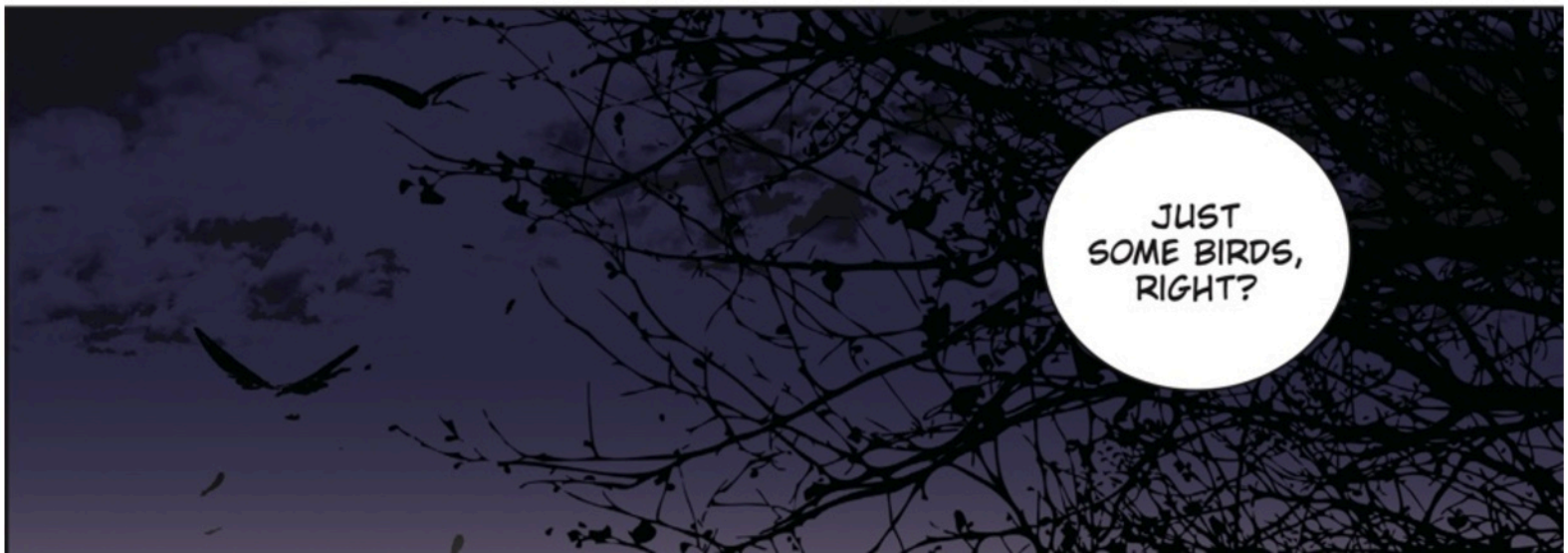

...IT'LL TELL YOU ANYTHING YOU WANT TO KNOW.
THOUGH I'M SURE IT'S JUST THEIR VERSION OF A CREEPYPASTA...
...IF THERE'S EVEN A CHANCE THAT MIRROR EXISTS...
CREAK
...THERE'S SOMETHING I'VE GOTTA KNOW—
WHERE BEATRICE IS.


SPOOOKY...
WHY DID I LEAVE THE SAFETY OF MY ROOM?
WELL, IT'S NOT QUITE AS BAD AS I THOUGHT.
MIRROR, MIRROR...
...
HERE YOU ARE.


NO NEED TO LOOK RIGHT AWAY, I CAN—

PEEK

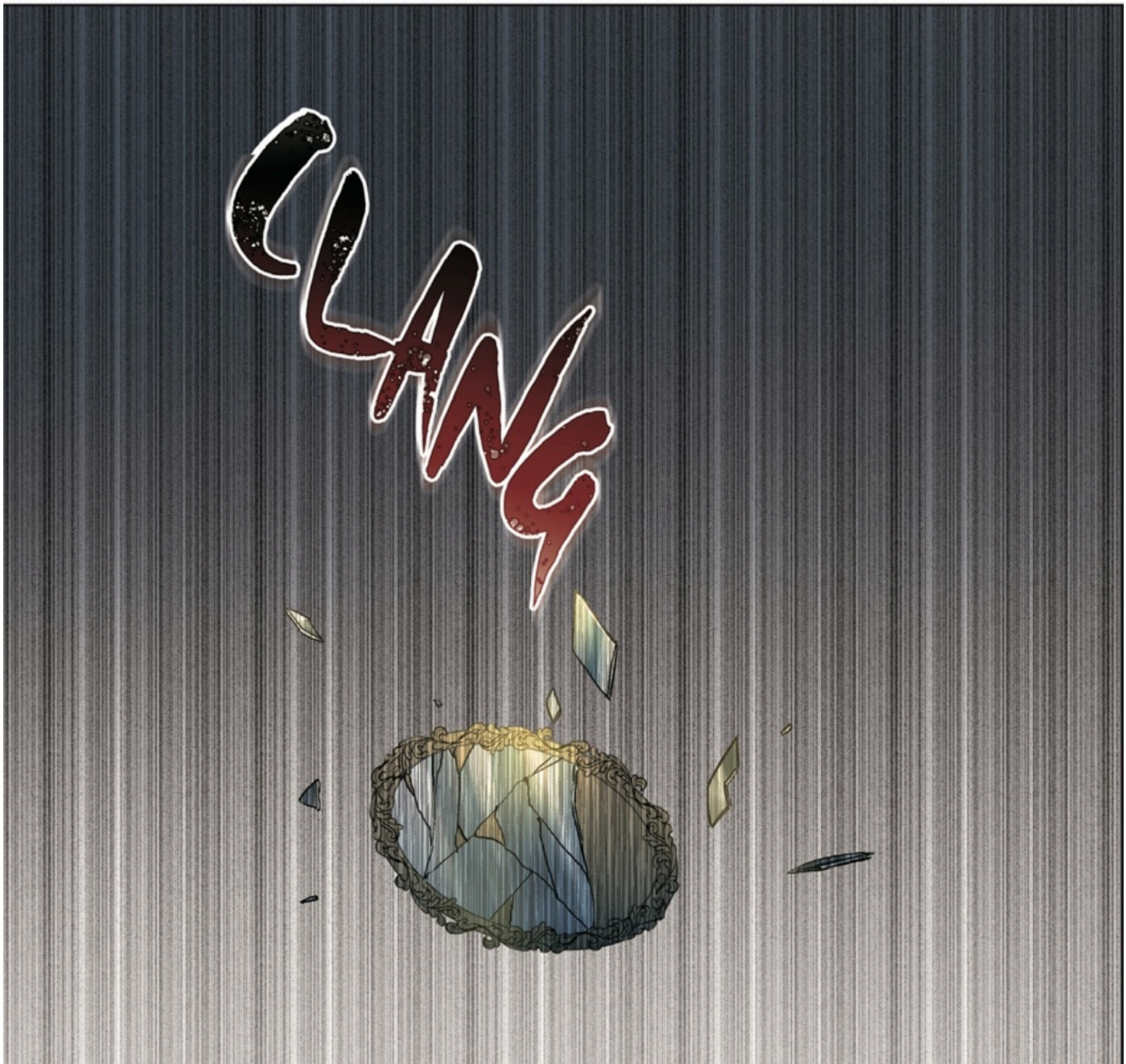

FLUTTER
ACK!


JUST SOME BIRDS, RIGHT?

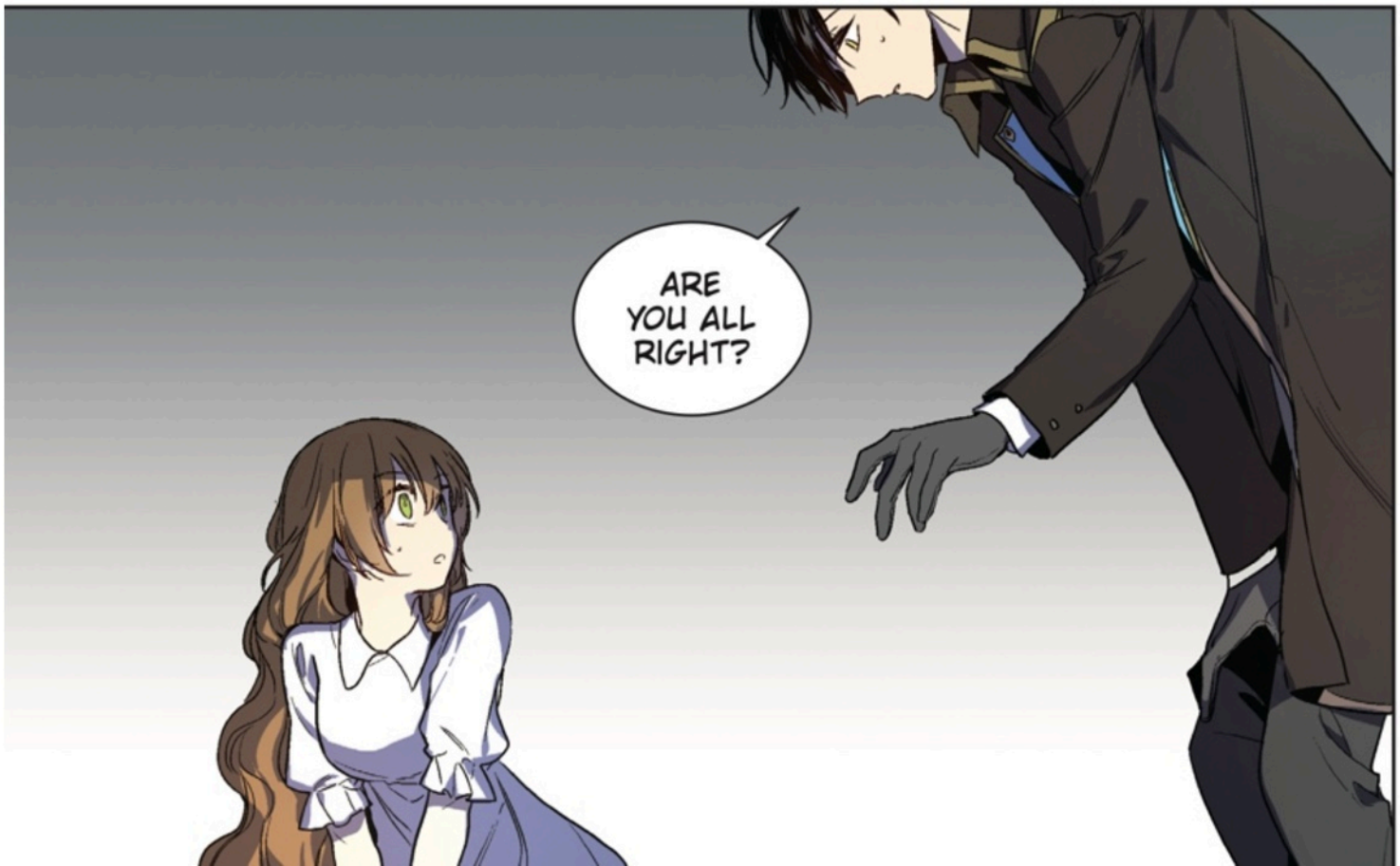
WHEW...
FLINCH
BLUE... EYE...
BA-THUMP
BA-THUMP
STAY CALM. IT COULD BE A TRICK OF THE LIGHT.

IS MAKING EYE CONTACT SERIOUSLY NECESSARY?
WHAT IF THE PART ABOUT TELLING ME ANYTHING WAS A LIE? IT MAY CURSE ME INSTEAD...
PEEK
I HEARD IT!
NOT CLEARLY, BUT...

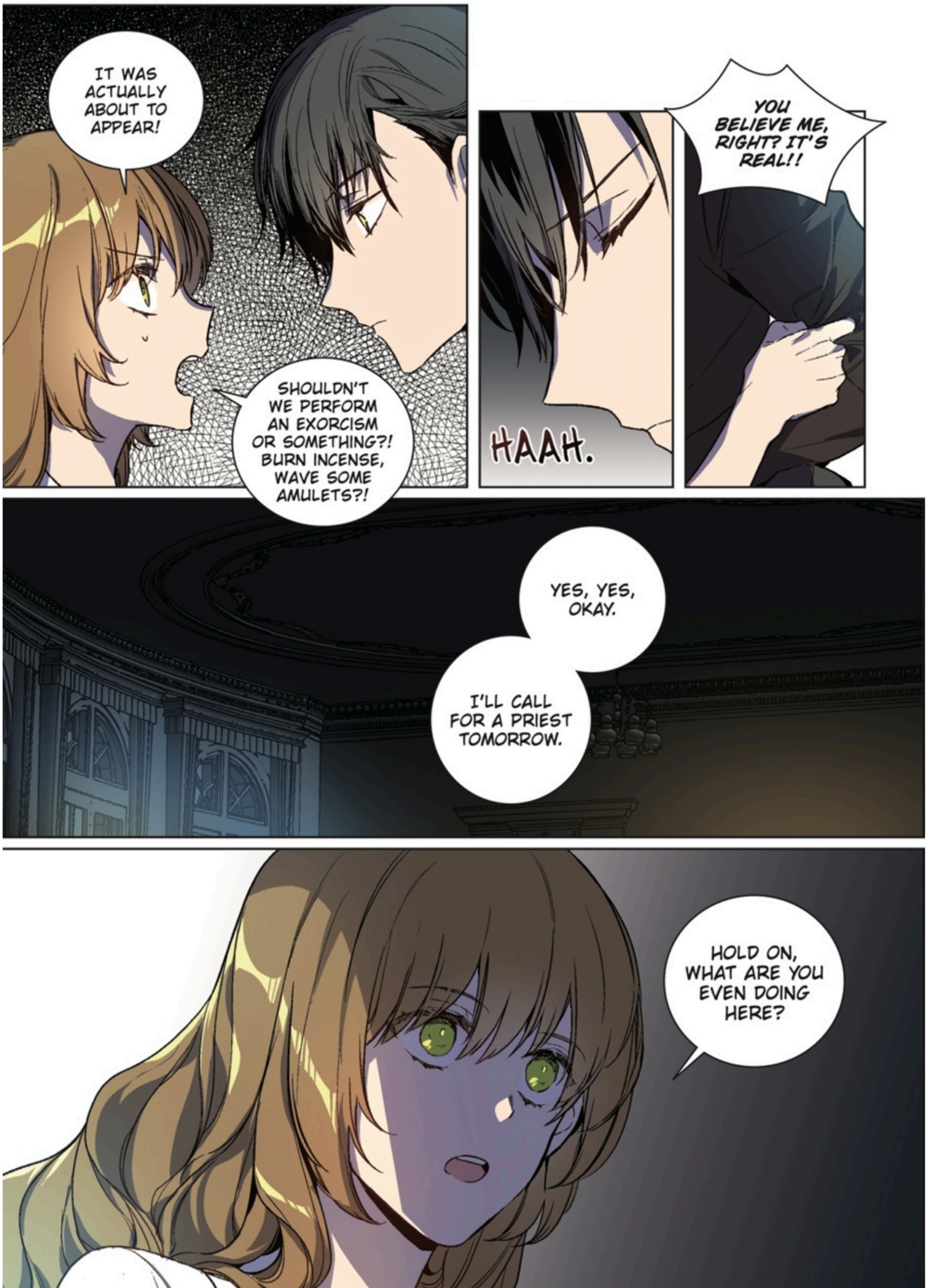
REACH


CLANG

Why Raeliana Ended Up at the Duke's Mansion


ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

WHY ARE YOU SO STARTLED?
SHF
NO, I—
...I SAW IT.
SAW WHAT?
THE GHOST.
.....

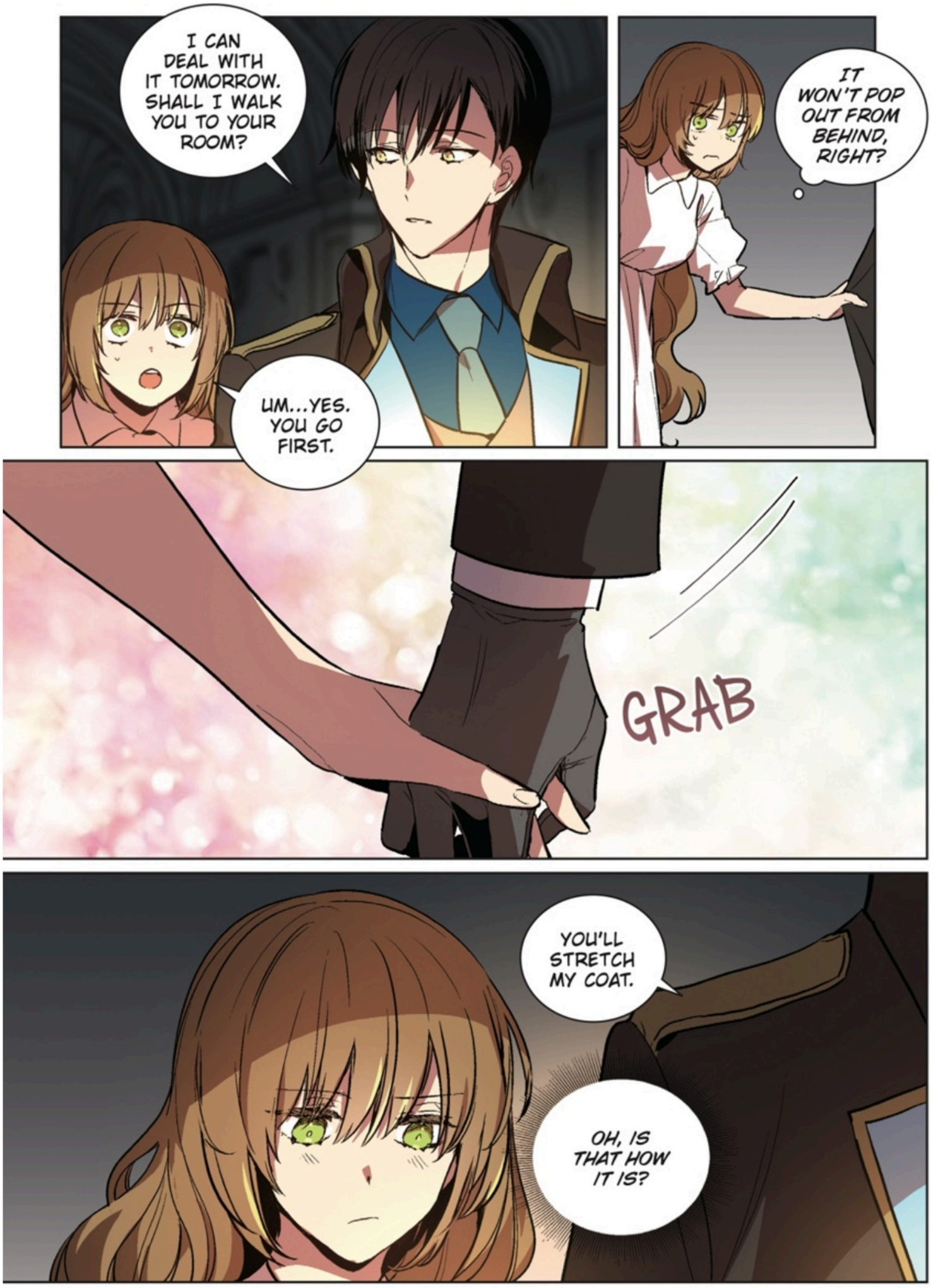

IT WAS ACTUALLY ABOUT TO APPEAR!
SHOULDN'T WE PERFORM AN EXORCISM OR SOMETHING?! BURN INCENSE, WAVE SOME AMULETS?!
HAAH.
YOU BELIEVE ME, RIGHT? IT'S REAL!!
YES, YES, OKAY.
I'LL CALL FOR A PRIEST TOMORROW.
HOLD ON, WHAT ARE YOU EVEN DOING HERE?

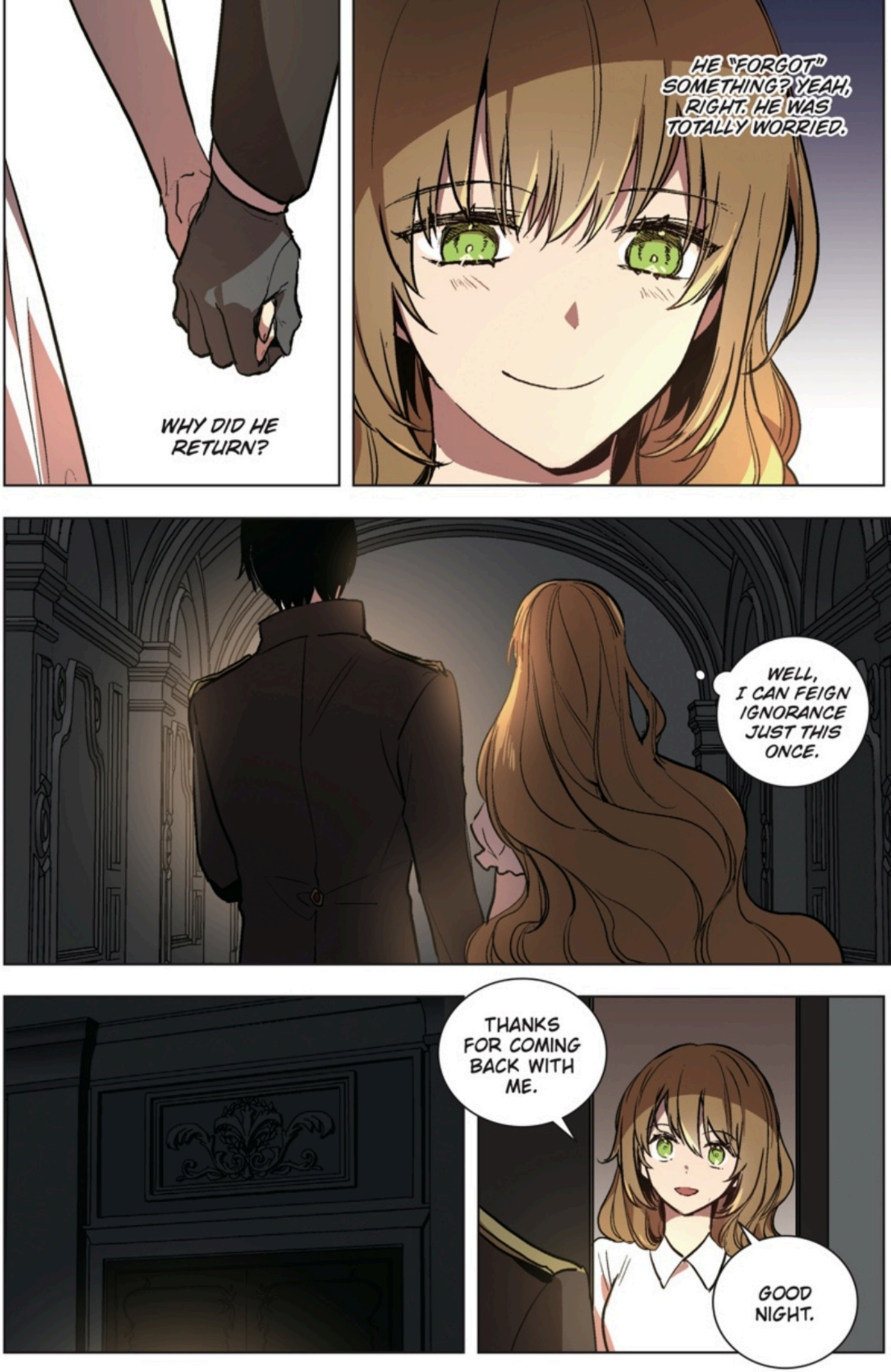
THERE WAS SOMETHING I FORGOT.
WAIT, WERE YOU WORRIED ABOUT ME?

.....
THERE WAS SOMETHING I FORGOT.
WHAT WAS IT? YOU'RE NOT LEAVING AGAIN, ARE YOU?

GRIIIP

HEH.
NO.

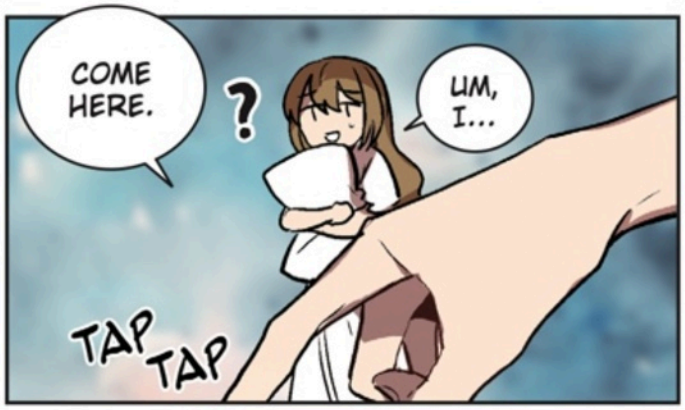

I CAN DEAL WITH IT TOMORROW. SHALL I WALK YOU TO YOUR ROOM?
UM...YES. YOU GO FIRST.
IT WON'T POP OUT FROM BEHIND, RIGHT?
GRAB
YOU'LL STRETCH MY COAT.
OH, IS THAT HOW IT IS?


WHY DID HE RETURN?
HE "FORGOT" SOMETHING? YEAH, RIGHT. HE WAS TOTALLY WORRIED.
WELL, I CAN FEIGN IGNORANCE JUST THIS ONCE.
THANKS FOR COMING BACK WITH ME.
GOOD NIGHT.

THMP
WILL YOU NOT BE SCARED?
HUH? OF WHAT?
YOU DID SAY YOU SAW A GHOST.
AH, YEAH. THAT...
SURE YOU WON'T BE IN TEARS, UNABLE TO SLEEP?
AAALL RIGHTY, YOU CAN LEAVE.

PAAAT
?
GO ON. I'LL STAY UNTIL YOU'VE FALLEN ASLEEP.
SHF

THEN YOU TAKE THE BED.
I'M FINE WITH THE SOFA.

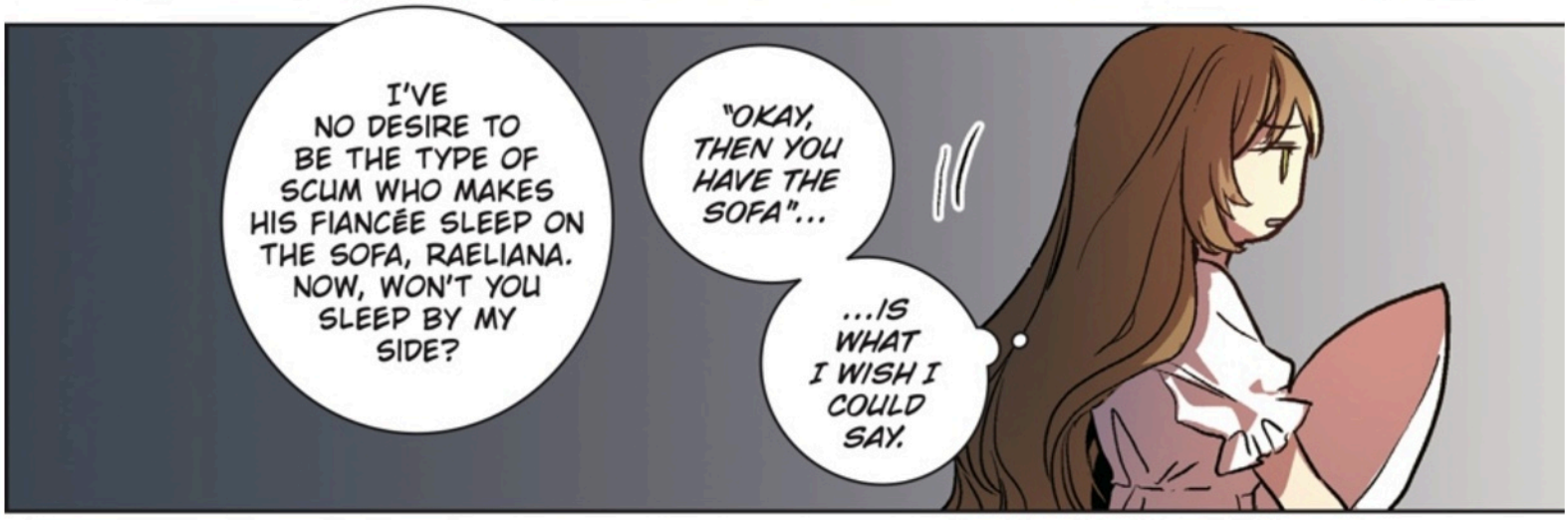

COME HERE.
?
UM, I...
TAP TAP

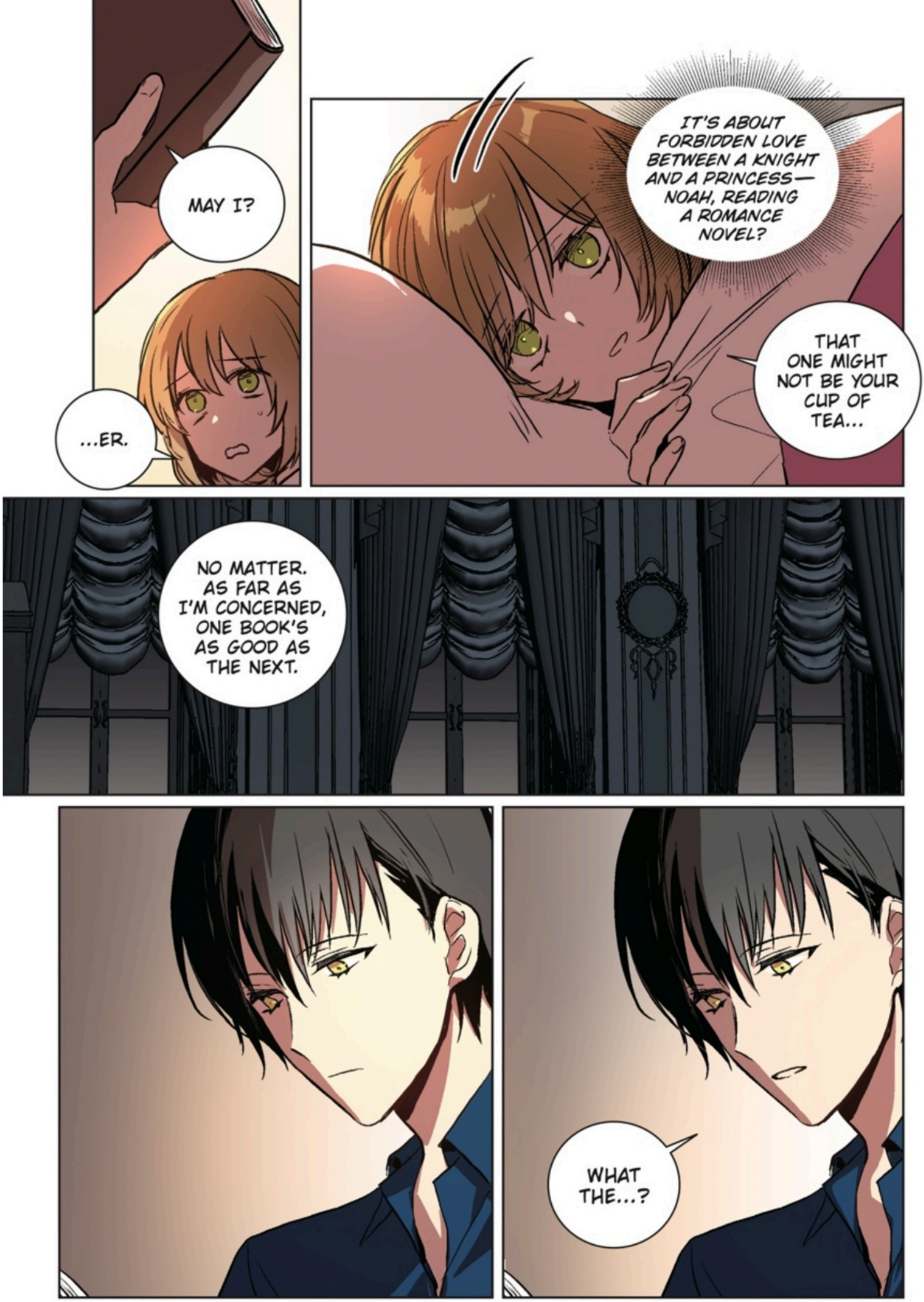
IT'S NOT AS THOUGH THIS IS OUR FIRST TIME. COME ON.

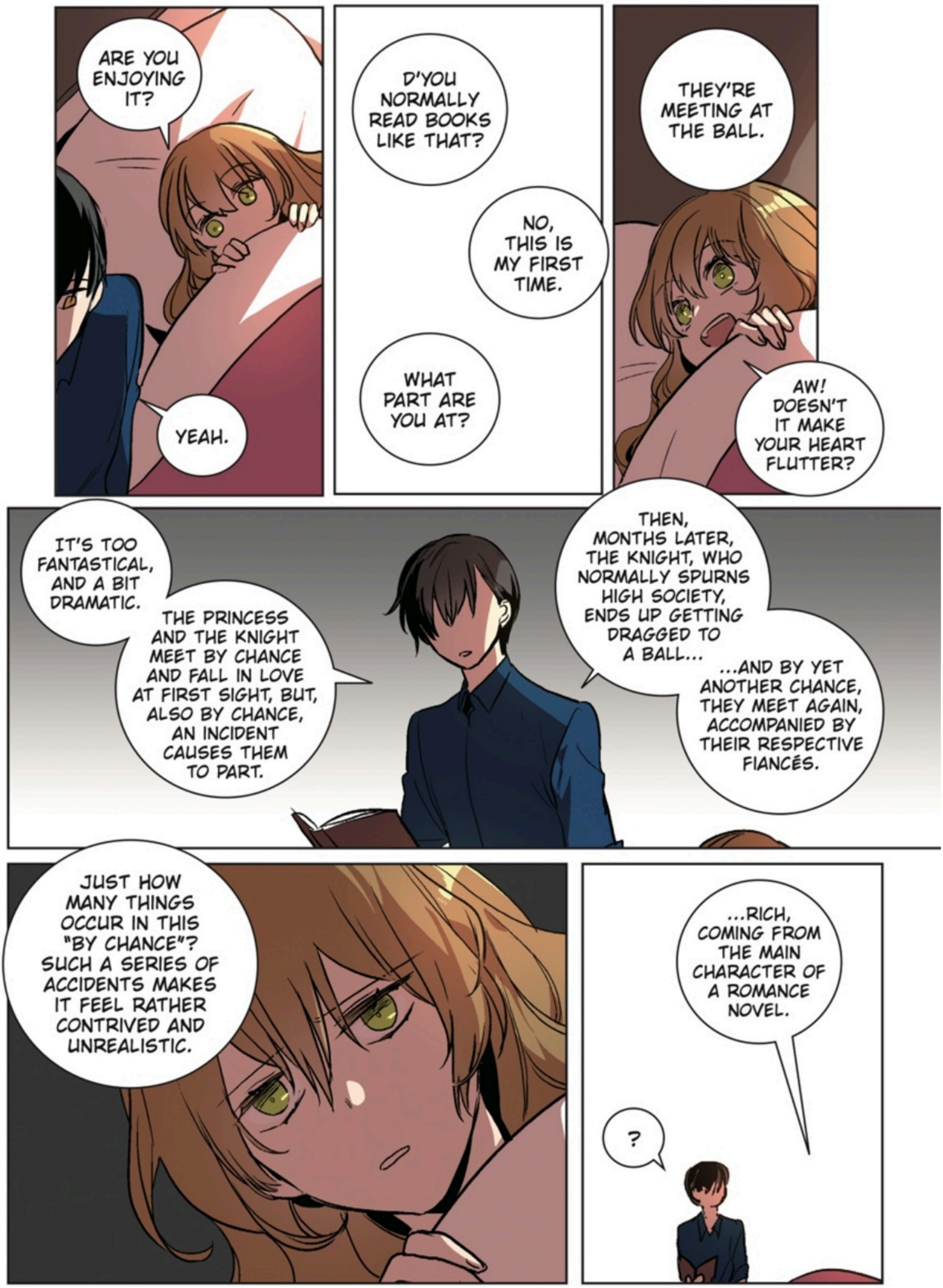
THWMP

UH, DON'T SAY IT LIKE THAT. PEOPLE WOULD GET THE WRONG IDEA!

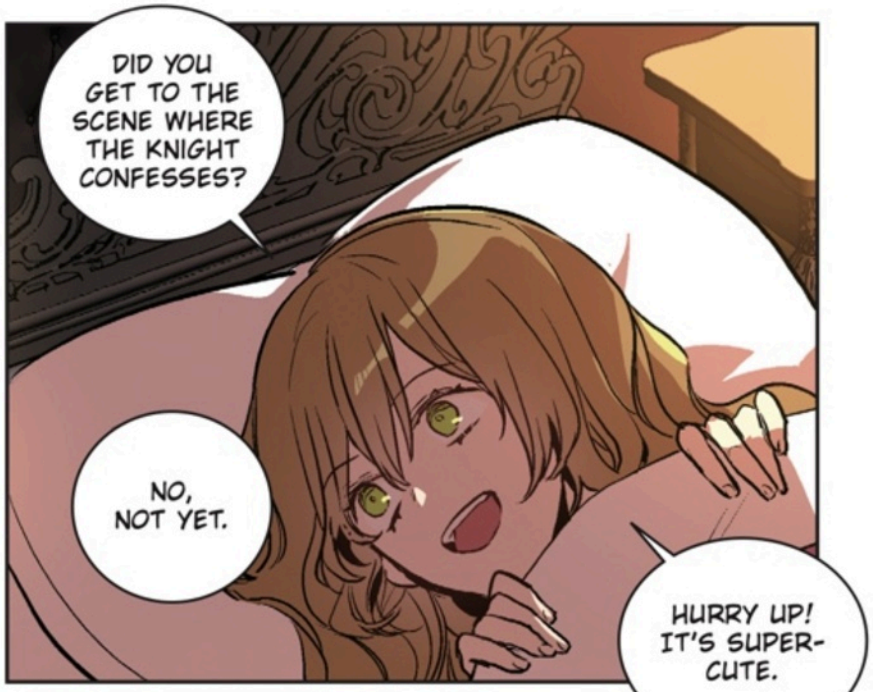
SHRUG


I'VE NO DESIRE TO BE THE TYPE OF SCUM WHO MAKES HIS FIANCÉE SLEEP ON THE SOFA, RAELIANA. NOW, WON'T YOU SLEEP BY MY SIDE?
"OKAY, THEN YOU HAVE THE SOFA"...
...IS WHAT I WISH I COULD SAY.

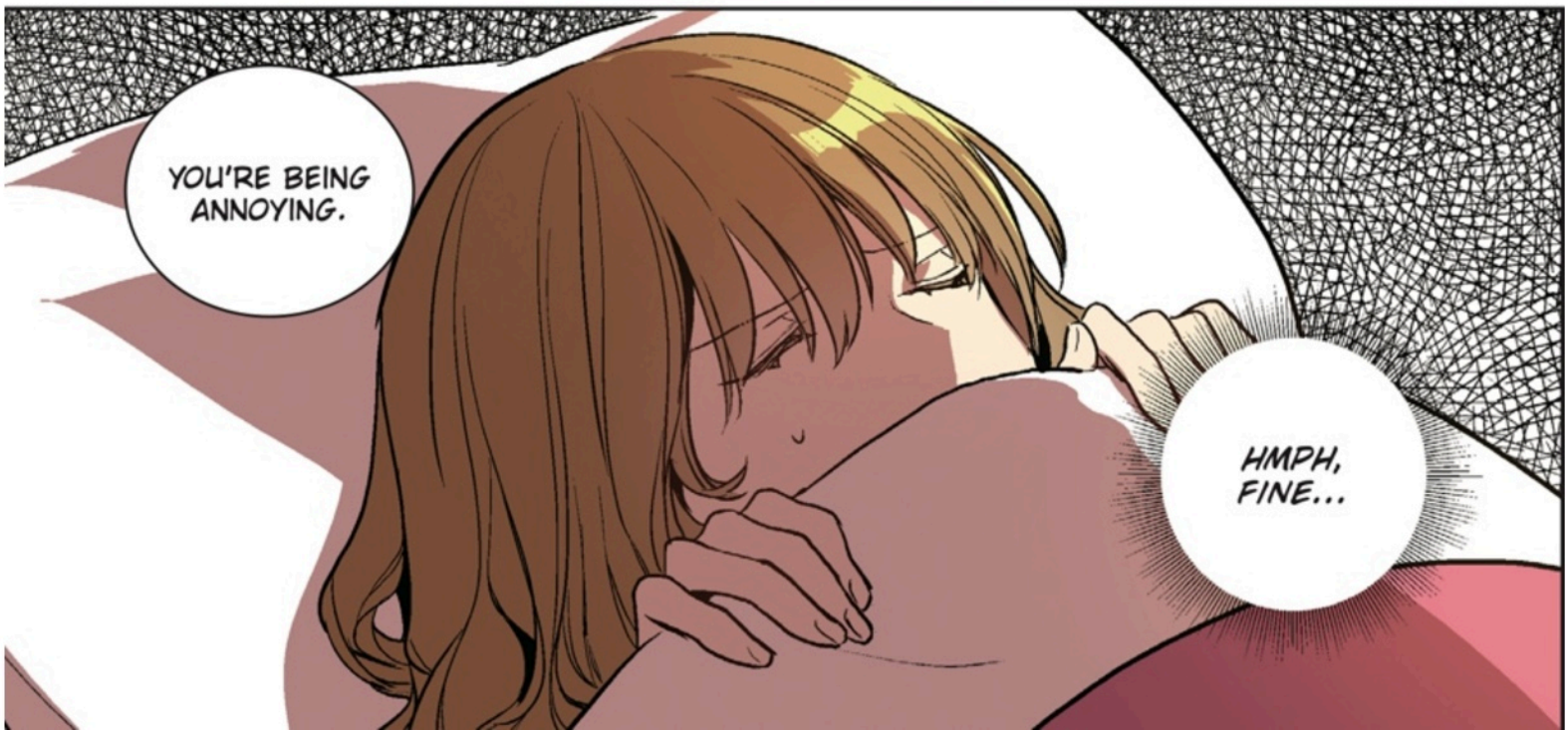

MAY I?
...ER.
IT'S ABOUT FORBIDDEN LOVE BETWEEN A KNIGHT AND A PRINCESS— NOAH, READING A ROMANCE NOVEL?
THAT ONE MIGHT NOT BE YOUR CUP OF TEA...
NO MATTER. AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, ONE BOOK'S AS GOOD AS THE NEXT.
WHAT THE...?


ARE YOU ENJOYING IT?
YEAH.
D'YOU NORMALLY READ BOOKS LIKE THAT?
NO, THIS IS MY FIRST TIME.
WHAT PART ARE YOU AT?
THEY'RE MEETING AT THE BALL.
AW! DOESN'T IT MAKE YOUR HEART FLUTTER?
IT'S TOO FANTASTICAL, AND A BIT DRAMATIC.
THE PRINCESS AND THE KNIGHT MEET BY CHANCE AND FALL IN LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT, BUT, ALSO BY CHANCE, AN INCIDENT CAUSES THEM TO PART.
THEN, MONTHS LATER, THE KNIGHT, WHO NORMALLY SPURNS HIGH SOCIETY, ENDS UP GETTING DRAGGED TO A BALL...
...AND BY YET ANOTHER CHANCE, THEY MEET AGAIN, ACCOMPANIED BY THEIR RESPECTIVE FIANCÉS.
JUST HOW MANY THINGS OCCUR IN THIS "BY CHANCE"? SUCH A SERIES OF ACCIDENTS MAKES IT FEEL RATHER CONTRIVED AND UNREALISTIC.
...RICH, COMING FROM THE MAIN CHARACTER OF A ROMANCE NOVEL.
?

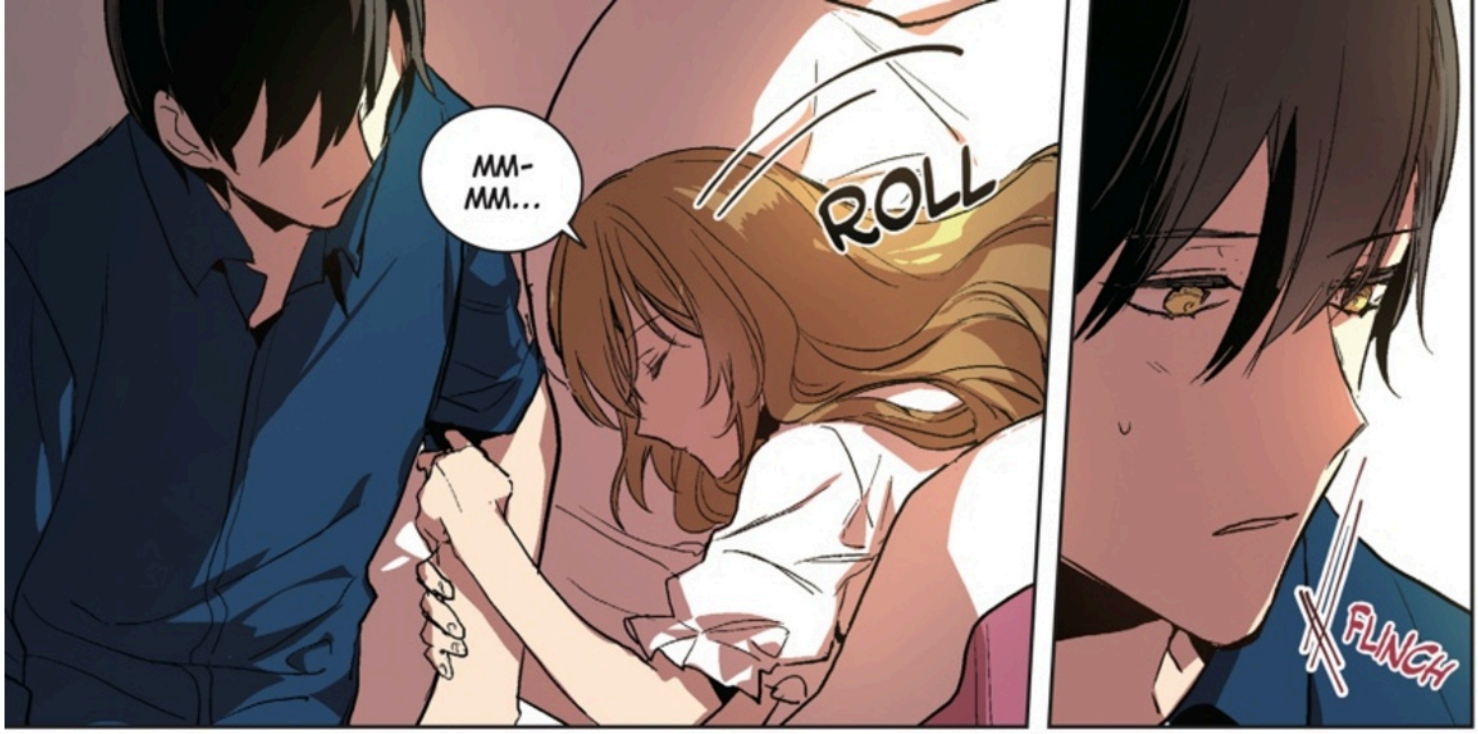
IF EVERYTHING UNFOLDED ACCORDING TO LOGIC AND REALISM, THERE'D BE NO ROOM FOR ROMANCE AND ALLURE.

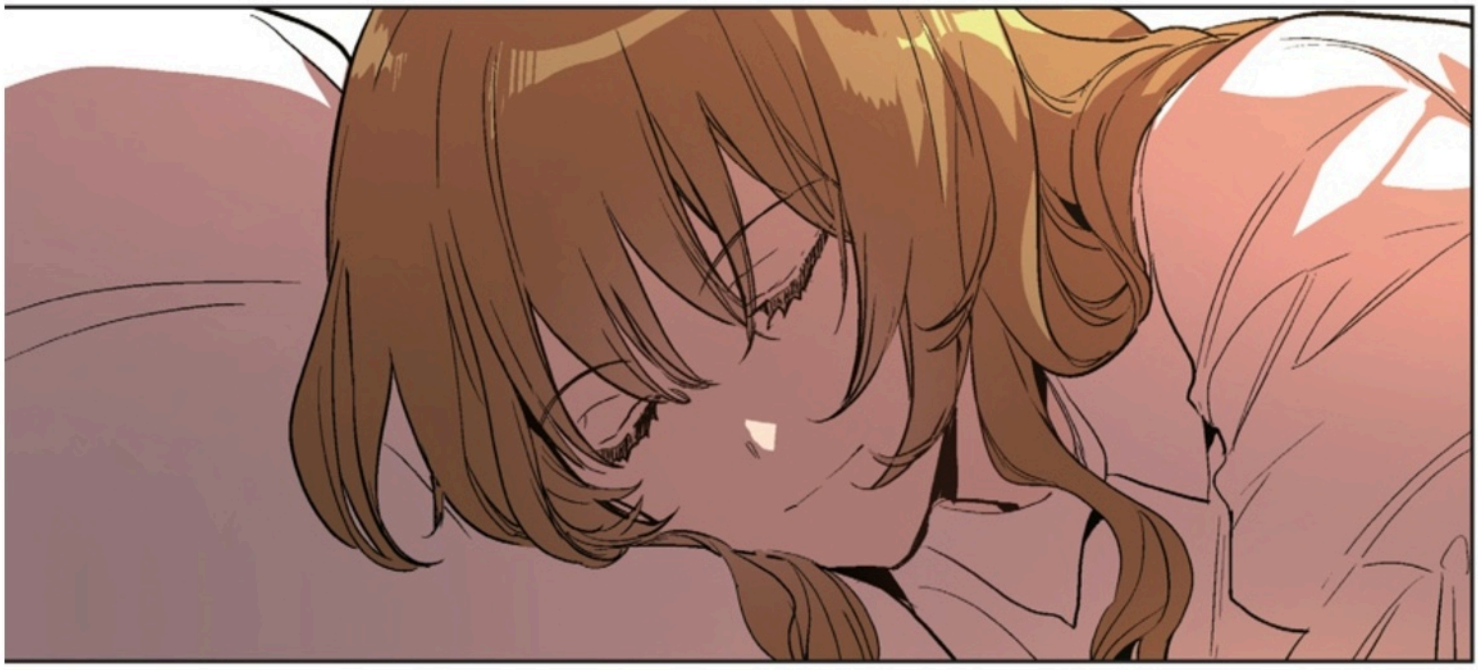

DID YOU GET TO THE SCENE WHERE THE KNIGHT CONFESSES?
NO, NOT YET.
HURRY UP! IT'S SUPER-CUTE.

RAELIANA.
ARE YOU NOT GOING TO SLEEP?
WHY DO YOU ASK?


YOU'RE BEING ANNOYING.
HMPH, FINE...

IT'S LATE. GET SOME SLEEP.
SHF


MM-
MM...
ROLL
FLINCH



FWUMP
I'M GOING
MAD.

Stage 8

Adjournment

TMP

COUNTESS O'BRIEN.

AH, DUKE WYNKNIGHT.

BOW

YOU'VE ARRIVED.

I'D HEARD YOU WERE BACK FROM YOUR VACATION.

INDEED. THE SCENERY WAS MOST MAGNIFICENT.

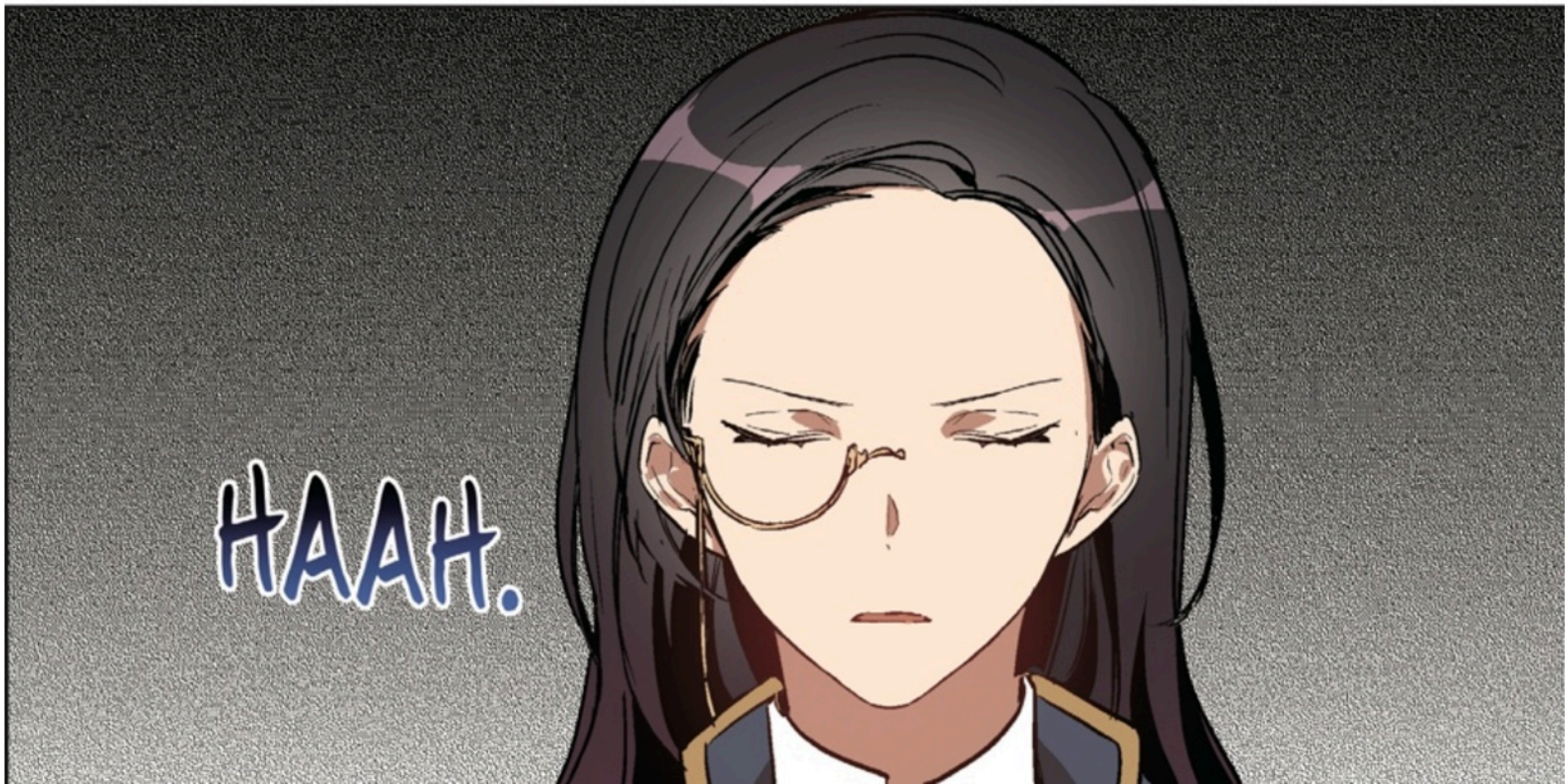
WAS IT NOW?

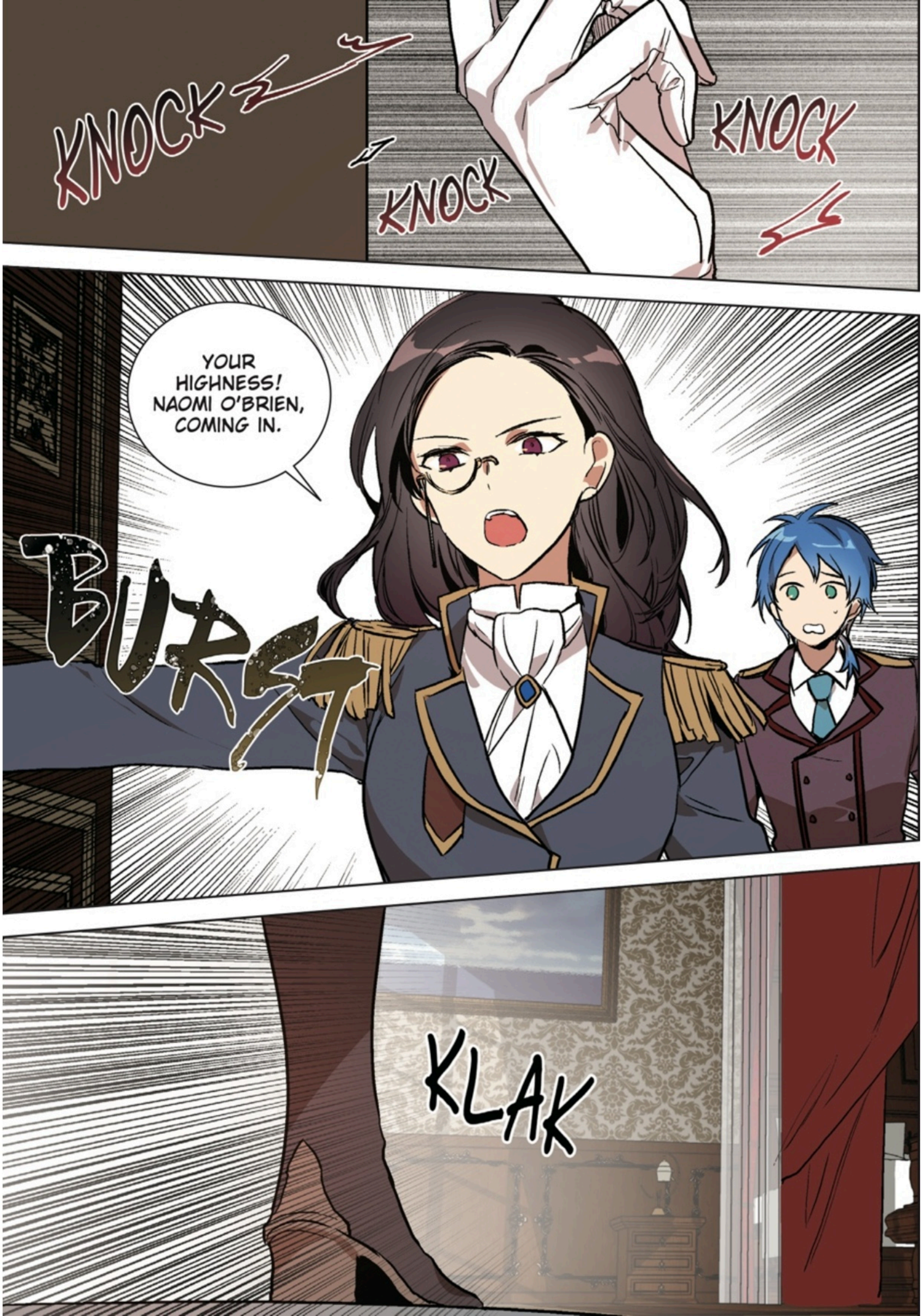
ONE MOMENT.

FWIP

BEFORE YOU ENTER...
...WOULD YOU MIND WAITING A BIT AT THE BEDROOM DOOR?

AH, RIGHT.
FIDGET
FIDGET


HAAH.


KNOCK
KNOCK
KNOCK
YOUR HIGHNESS! NAOMI O'BRIEN, COMING IN.
BURST
KLAK

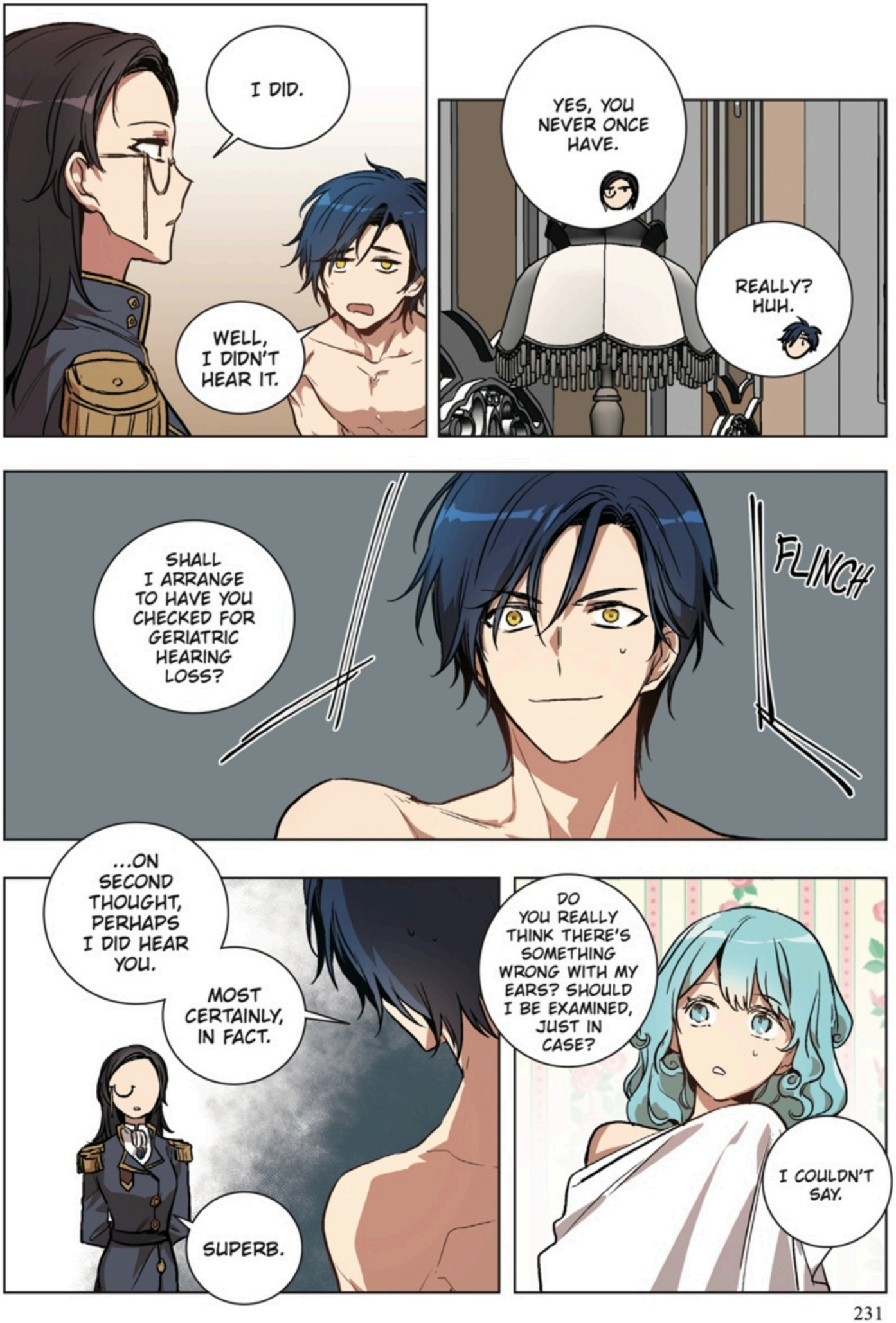
I HATE MY JOB...
...HATE MY JOB...
...HATE MY JOB.

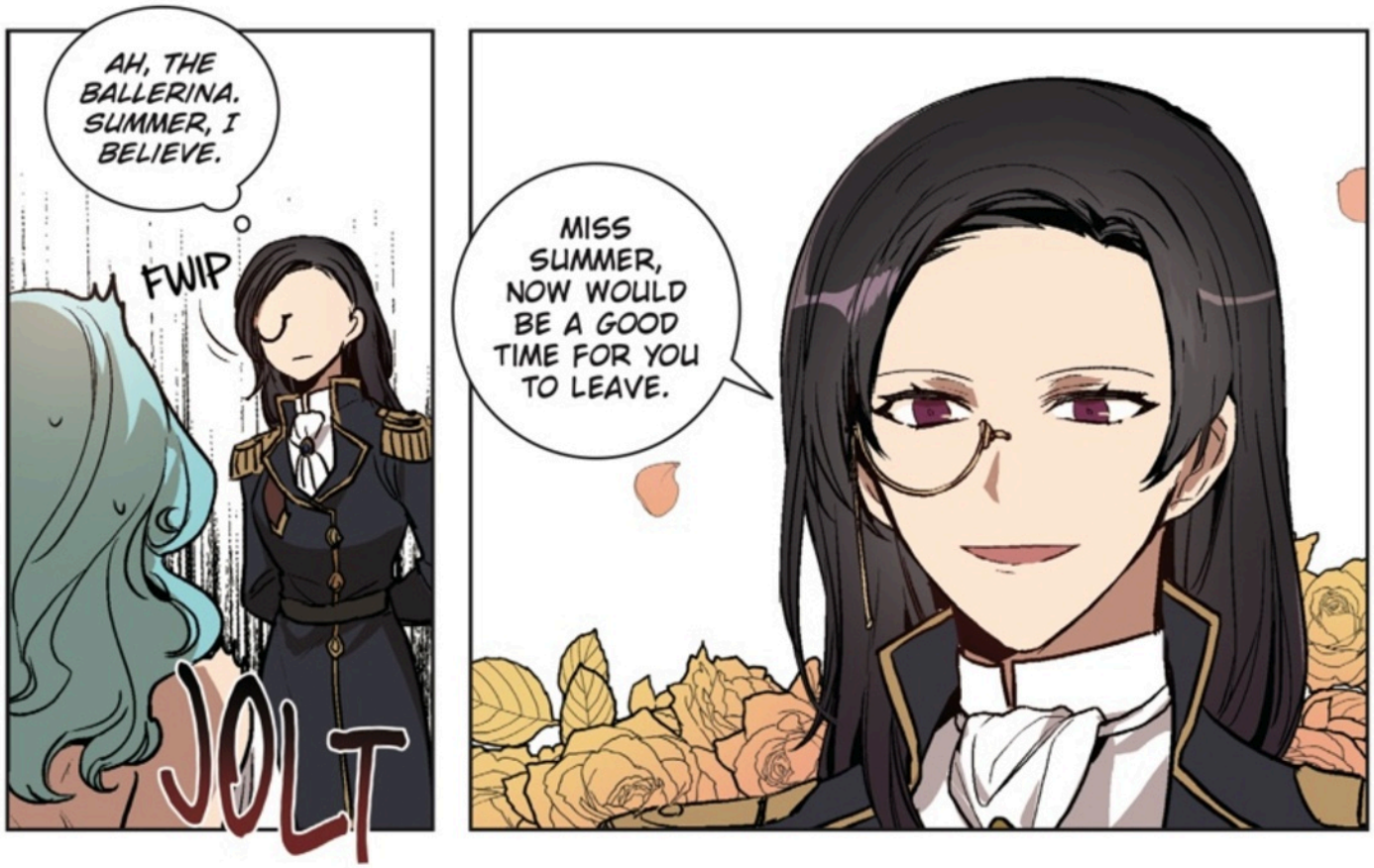
I WANT TO QUIT...
...REALLY WANT TO QUIT!

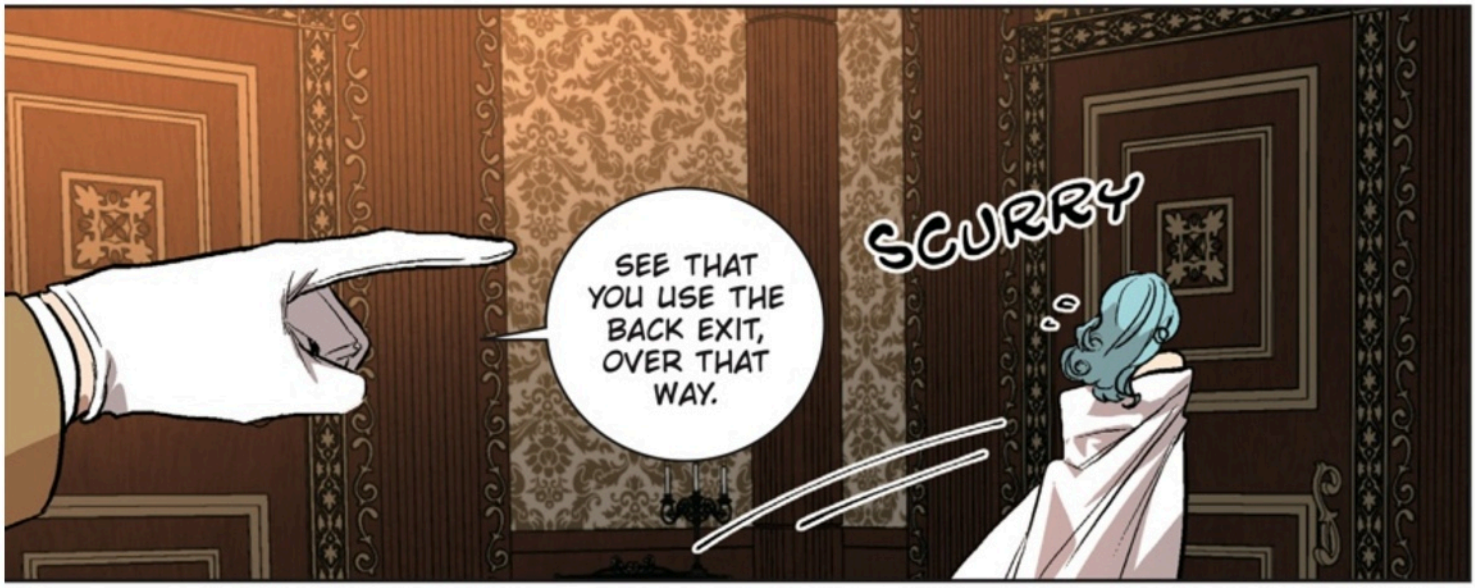
YOUR HIGHNESS.
EEEK!!
WOOSH

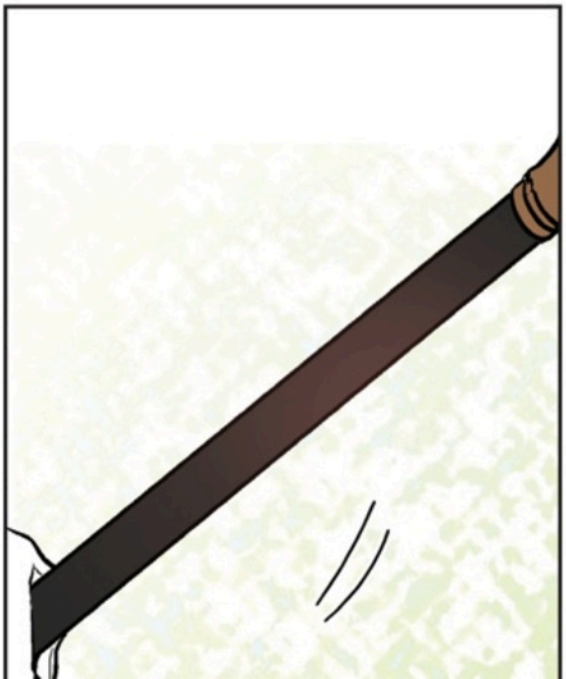
IT'S TIME TO GET UP.
HOIST
NAOMI...

HAAH...
...YOU ARE MUCH TOO RUDE.
YOU OUGHT TO AT LEAST HAVE KNOCKED, NO?


I DID.
WELL, I DIDN'T HEAR IT.
YES, YOU NEVER ONCE HAVE.
REALLY? HUH.
SHALL I ARRANGE TO HAVE YOU CHECKED FOR GERIATRIC HEARING LOSS?
FLINCH
...ON SECOND THOUGHT, PERHAPS I DID HEAR YOU.
MOST CERTAINLY, IN FACT.
SUPERB.
DO YOU REALLY THINK THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH MY EARS? SHOULD I BE EXAMINED, JUST IN CASE?
I COULDN'T SAY.

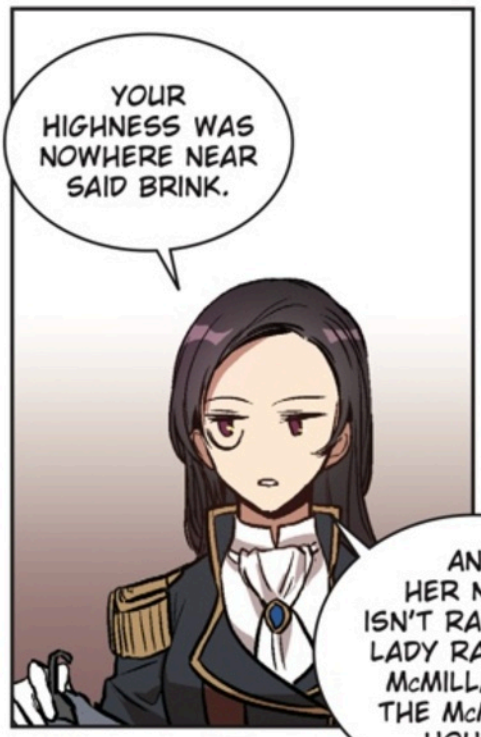






AH, THAT REMINDS ME.

I HEARD AN INTERESTING PIECE OF GOSSIP FROM MISS SUMMER.
WHILE I WAS ON THE BRINK OF LIFE AND DEATH, MY ADORABLE BABY BROTHER FOUND HIMSELF A FIANCÉE WITH WHOM HE'S MADLY IN LOVE?
LET'S SEE... WHAT WAS HER NAME AGAIN? RALI?


YOUR HIGHNESS WAS NOWHERE NEAR SAID BRINK.

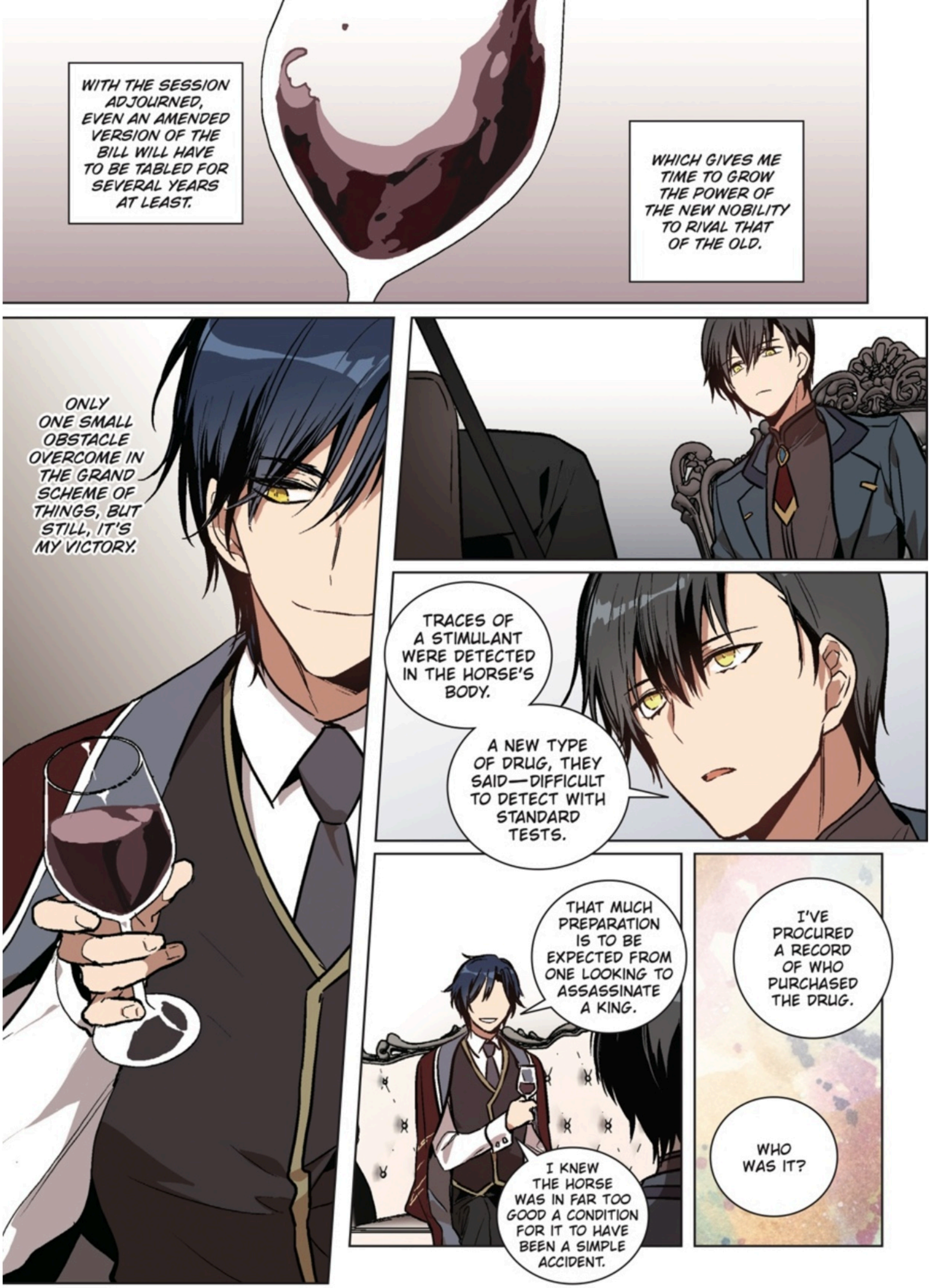
AND HER NAME ISN'T RALI. IT'S LADY RAELIANA McMILLAN OF THE McMILLAN HOUSE.
HMMM.

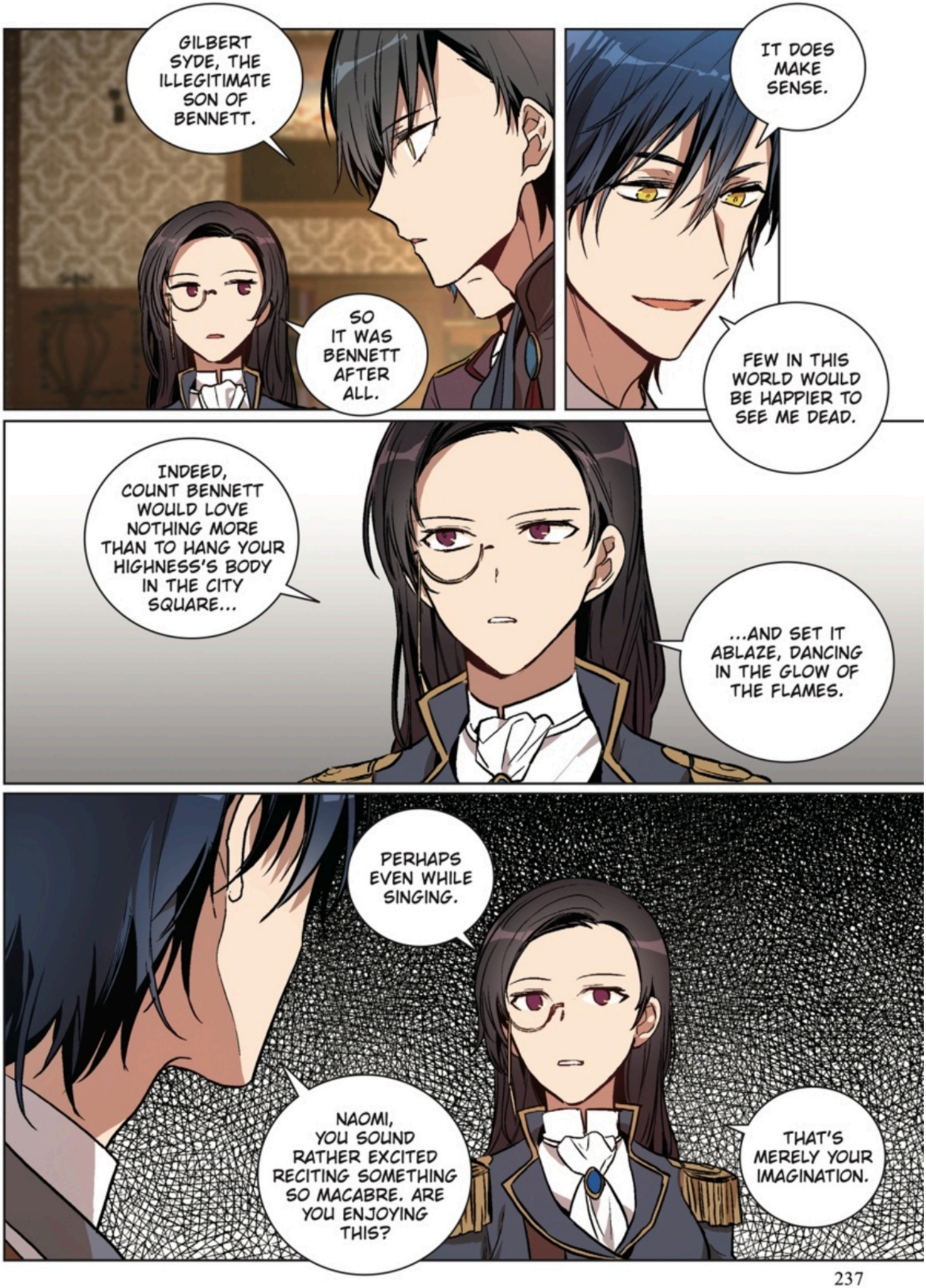
YOU'RE ABLE TO COLLECT SUCH RUMORS IN BED?
ALL OUT OF BROTHERLY AFFECTION, YOU KNOW. ^^

IGNORE
MISTER KEITH!
PEEK

YOUR HIGHNESS. I'M PLEASED TO SEE YOU'VE RECOVERED.
OH, KEITH— IT'S BEEN A WHILE.
SEEING YOU AGAIN AFTER SO LONG, I FEEL... I FEEL...
YOU'VE NOTHING TO SAY?
HM, YES, EVEN AFTER SO LONG, JUST THE SAME AS EVER.
...I'M HONORED TO HEAR.
...WHAT AM I TALKING ABOUT, AN HONOR...?
SO, WHERE'S NOAH?
I'M HERE.
OH, NOAH—IT'S BEEN A WHILE. SEEING YOU AG—
I ALREADY HEARD WHAT YOU SAID TO KEITH— IT WAS HARDLY AMUSING. LET'S GET DOWN TO BUSINESS.

HOW COLD OF YOU. ANYHOW, WE'RE STILL ONE SHORT, NO? MISSING THAT RED-EYED GUY.
IF YOU MEAN ADAM, HE HAS YET TO RETURN FROM A MATTER HE'S ATTENDING TO.
HMM, THAT'S UNUSUAL.
WELL THEN, IT'S STILL A BIT EARLY, BUT SINCE WE'RE ALL GATHERED HERE...
...SHALL WE HAVE A TOAST AND DRINK TO TOMORROW?
TO THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE ROYAL ASSEMBLY'S SESSION.


WITH THE SESSION ADJOURNED, EVEN AN AMENDED VERSION OF THE BILL WILL HAVE TO BE TABLED FOR SEVERAL YEARS AT LEAST.
WHICH GIVES ME TIME TO GROW THE POWER OF THE NEW NOBILITY TO RIVAL THAT OF THE OLD.
ONLY ONE SMALL OBSTACLE OVERCOME IN THE GRAND SCHEME OF THINGS, BUT STILL, IT'S MY VICTORY.
TRACES OF A STIMULANT WERE DETECTED IN THE HORSE'S BODY.
A NEW TYPE OF DRUG, THEY SAID—DIFFICULT TO DETECT WITH STANDARD TESTS.
THAT MUCH PREPARATION IS TO BE EXPECTED FROM ONE LOOKING TO ASSASSINATE A KING.
I KNEW THE HORSE WAS IN FAR TOO GOOD A CONDITION FOR IT TO HAVE BEEN A SIMPLE ACCIDENT.
I'VE PROCURED A RECORD OF WHO PURCHASED THE DRUG.
WHO WAS IT?


GILBERT SYDE, THE ILLEGITIMATE SON OF BENNETT.
SO IT WAS BENNETT AFTER ALL.
IT DOES MAKE SENSE.
FEW IN THIS WORLD WOULD BE HAPPIER TO SEE ME DEAD.
INDEED, COUNT BENNETT WOULD LOVE NOTHING MORE THAN TO HANG YOUR HIGHNESS'S BODY IN THE CITY SQUARE...
...AND SET IT ABLAZE, DANCING IN THE GLOW OF THE FLAMES.
PERHAPS EVEN WHILE SINGING.
NAOMI, YOU SOUND RATHER EXCITED RECITING SOMETHING SO MACABRE. ARE YOU ENJOYING THIS?
THAT'S MERELY YOUR IMAGINATION.

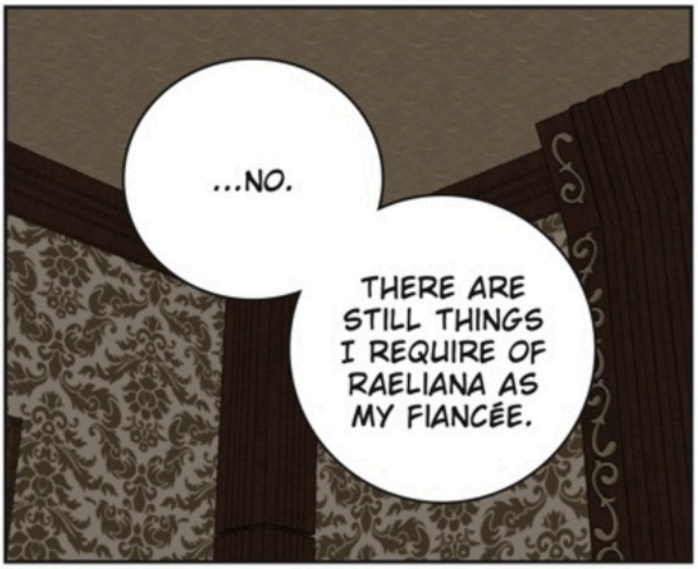
AND WHAT OF THE BASTARD SON?
IN ORDER TO EXTRACT A TESTIMONY AGAINST BENNETT, HE WAS MOVED TO THE DUNGEON.
BY THE WAY, NOAH.

YOU'RE BETROTHED NOW, I HEAR? TO...RALI-ANNA?
AS I ALREADY TOLD YOU, HER NAME IS LADY RAELIANA McMILLAN.

RAELIANA, YES.
QUITE AN ABRUPT CHANGE OF HEART—WHAT IN THE WORLD HAPPENED WHILE I WAS PLASTERED ON PAINKILLERS FOR YOU TO DO THIS?

...IT'S A BIT OF A COMPLICATED STORY.
WE...

...I SEE. SO YOU'LL BREAK IT OFF NOW.
EXCUSE ME?
THE ASSEMBLY IS OVER, SO THE MATTER WITH THE ROYAL SEAL NO LONGER HAS ANY LEVERAGE. AND SHE'S RID OF THAT AWFUL FIANCÉ.
WHAT'S LEFT BUT TO END THINGS? NOAH, SURELY YOU HAVE NO DESIRE TO DRAG OUT A TRANSACTIONAL ENGAGEMENT.
HESITATE
...WELL.
???


...NO.
THERE ARE STILL THINGS I REQUIRE OF RAELIANA AS MY FIANCÉE.

WELL, LOOK WHAT WE HAVE HERE.
HEH!

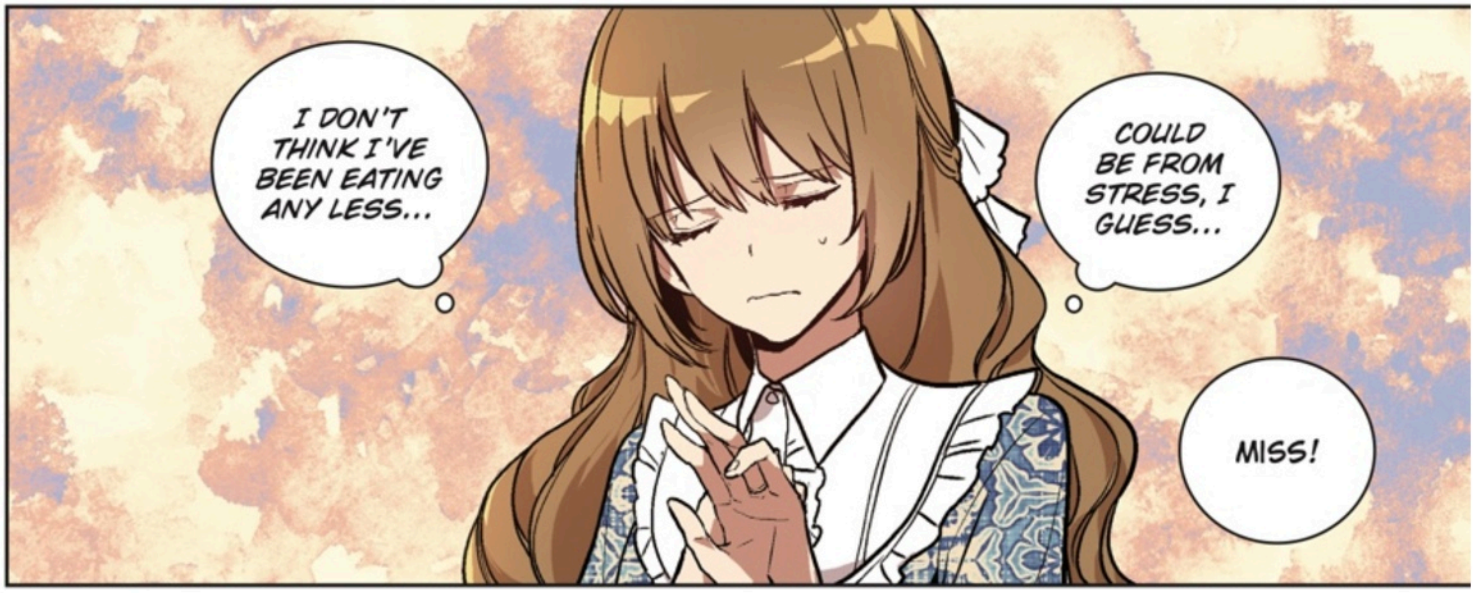
YOU'RE RATHER DENSE WHEN IT COMES TO THIS TYPE OF THING, HUH.
WHAT ARE YOU GOING ON ABOUT ALL OF A SUDDEN?

GRIN

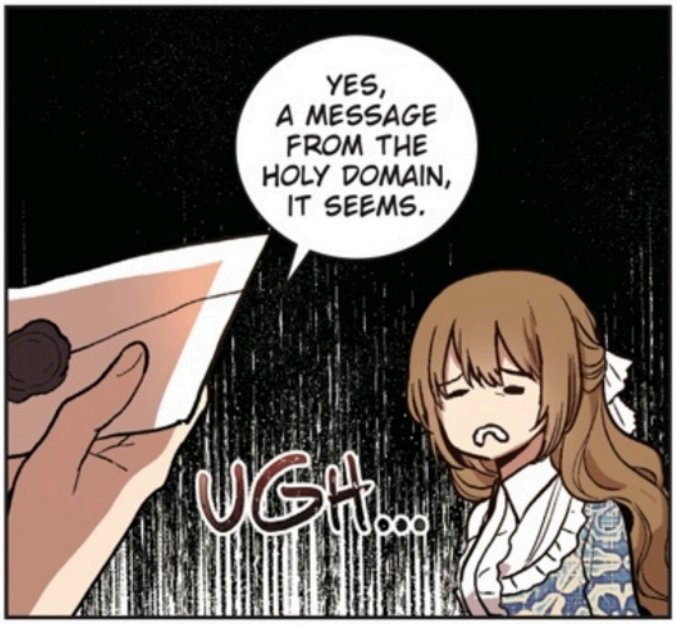
Why Raeliana Ended Up at the Duke's Mansion

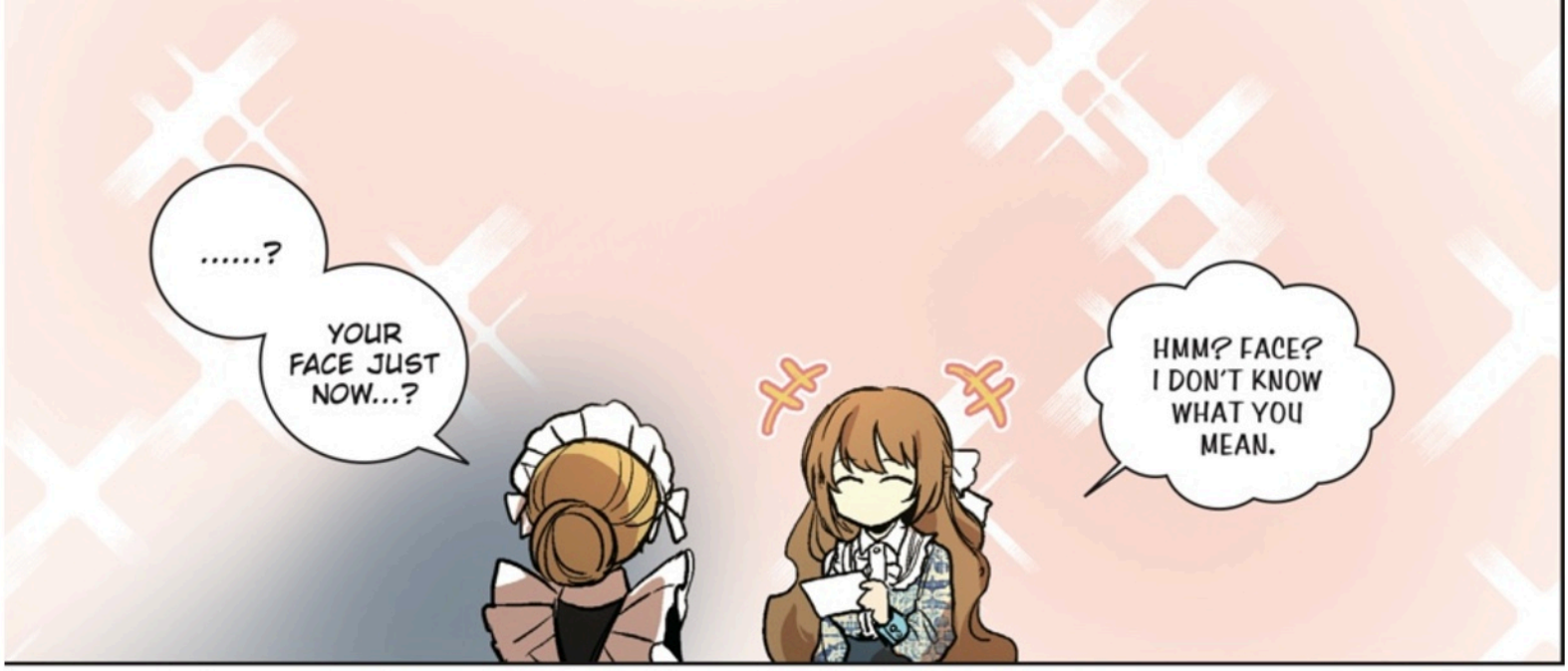
MY ENGAGEMENT RING IS LOOSE. DID I LOSE WEIGHT?

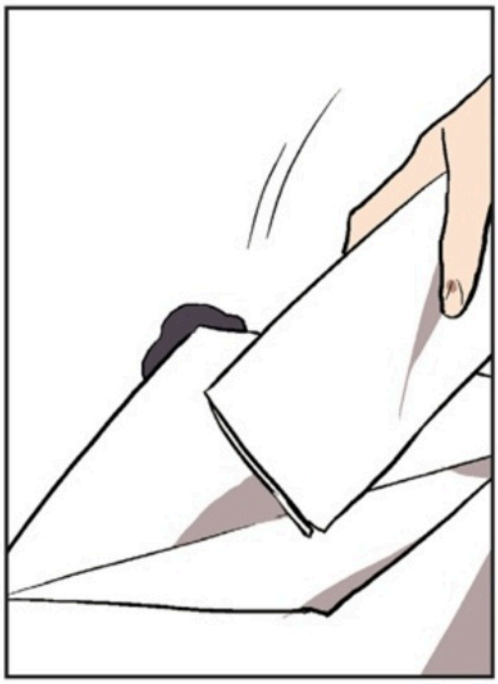
SLIIIDE


I DON'T THINK I'VE BEEN EATING ANY LESS...
COULD BE FROM STRESS, I GUESS...
MISS!

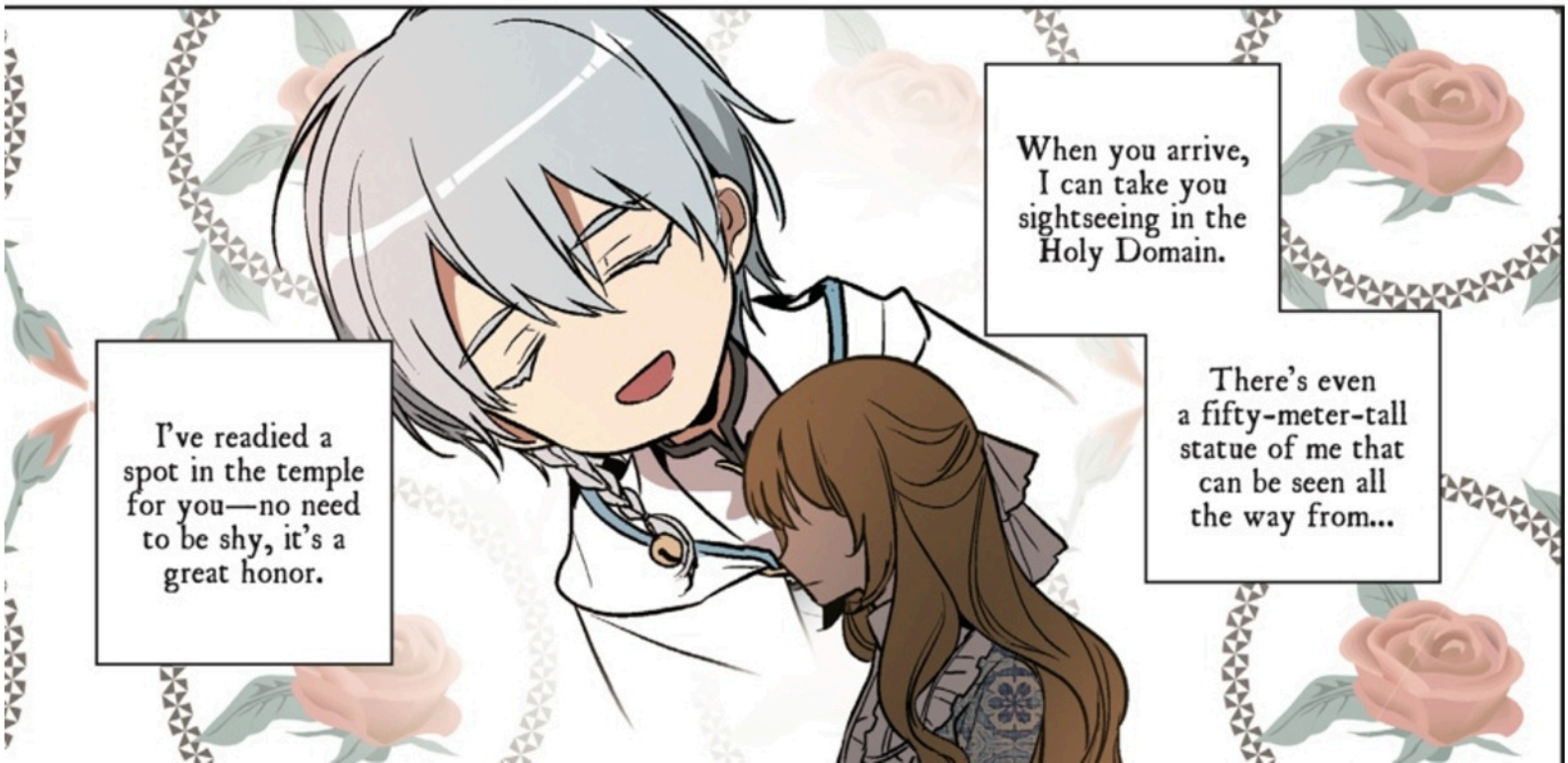
THERE'S A LETTER FOR YOU.
A LETTER?

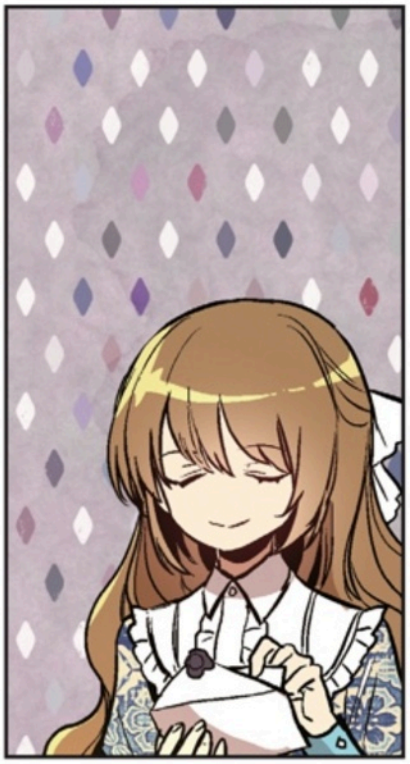

YES, A MESSAGE FROM THE HOLY DOMAIN, IT SEEMS.
UGH...


.....?
YOUR FACE JUST NOW...?
HMM? FACE? I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN.

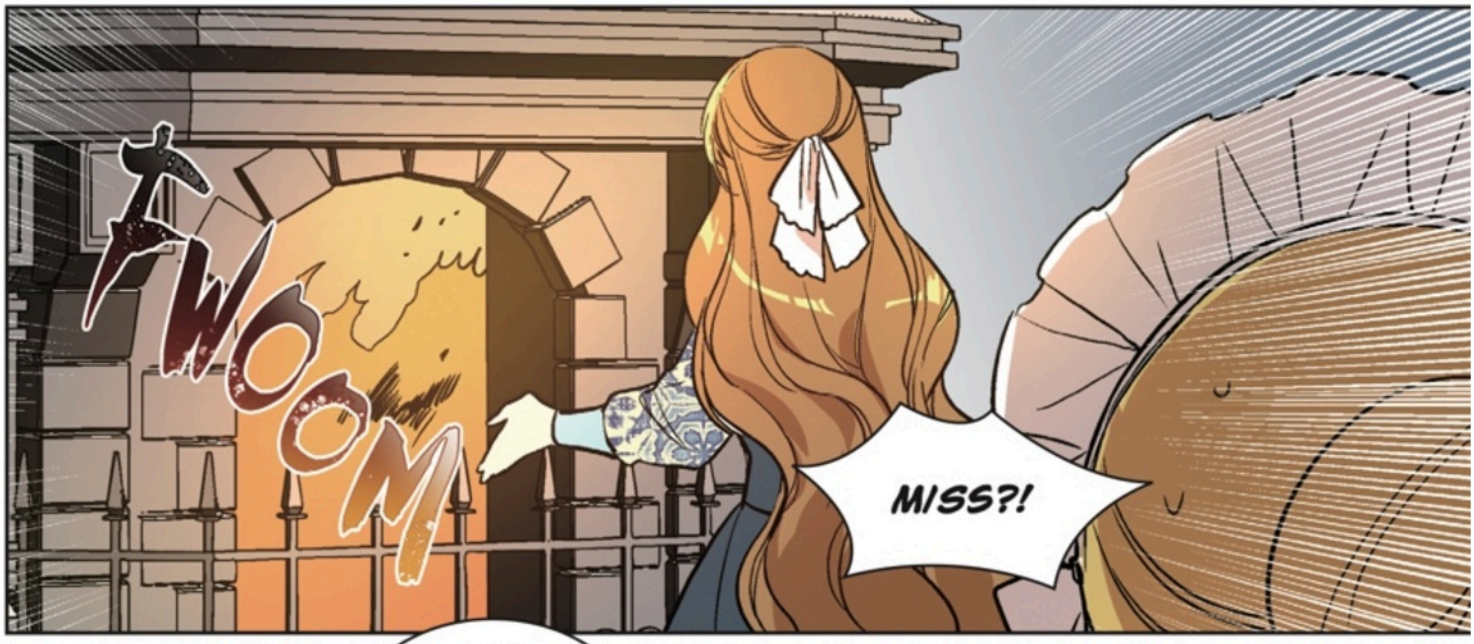


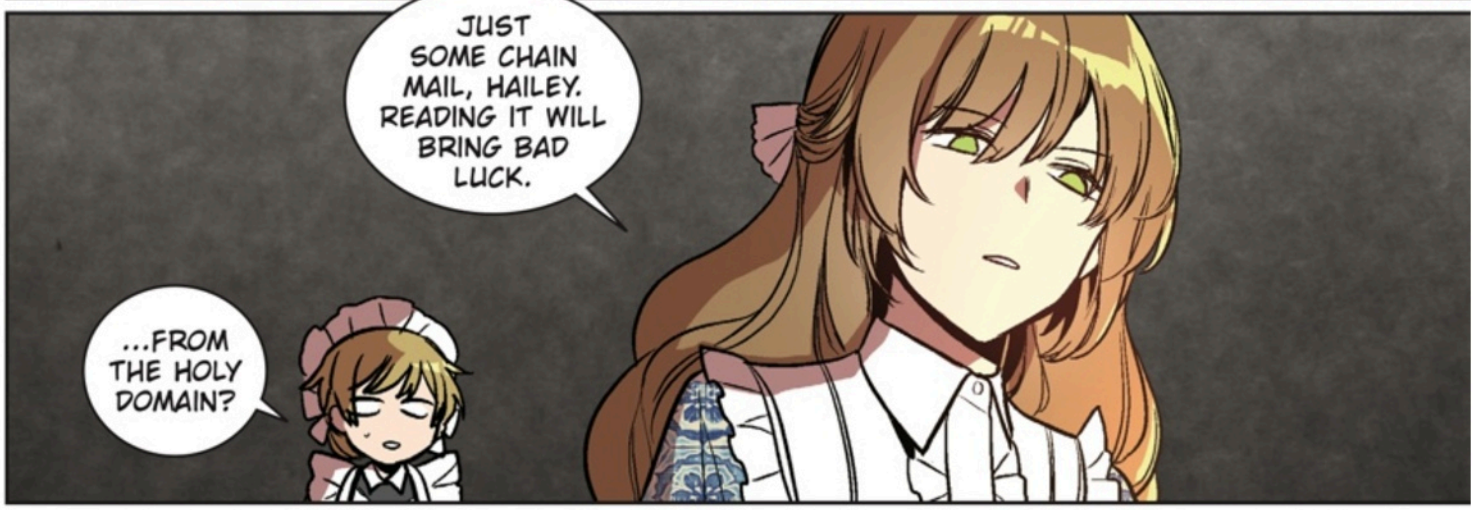
Raeliana, this is your grandpa. I've spent many nights tossing and turning since you left...

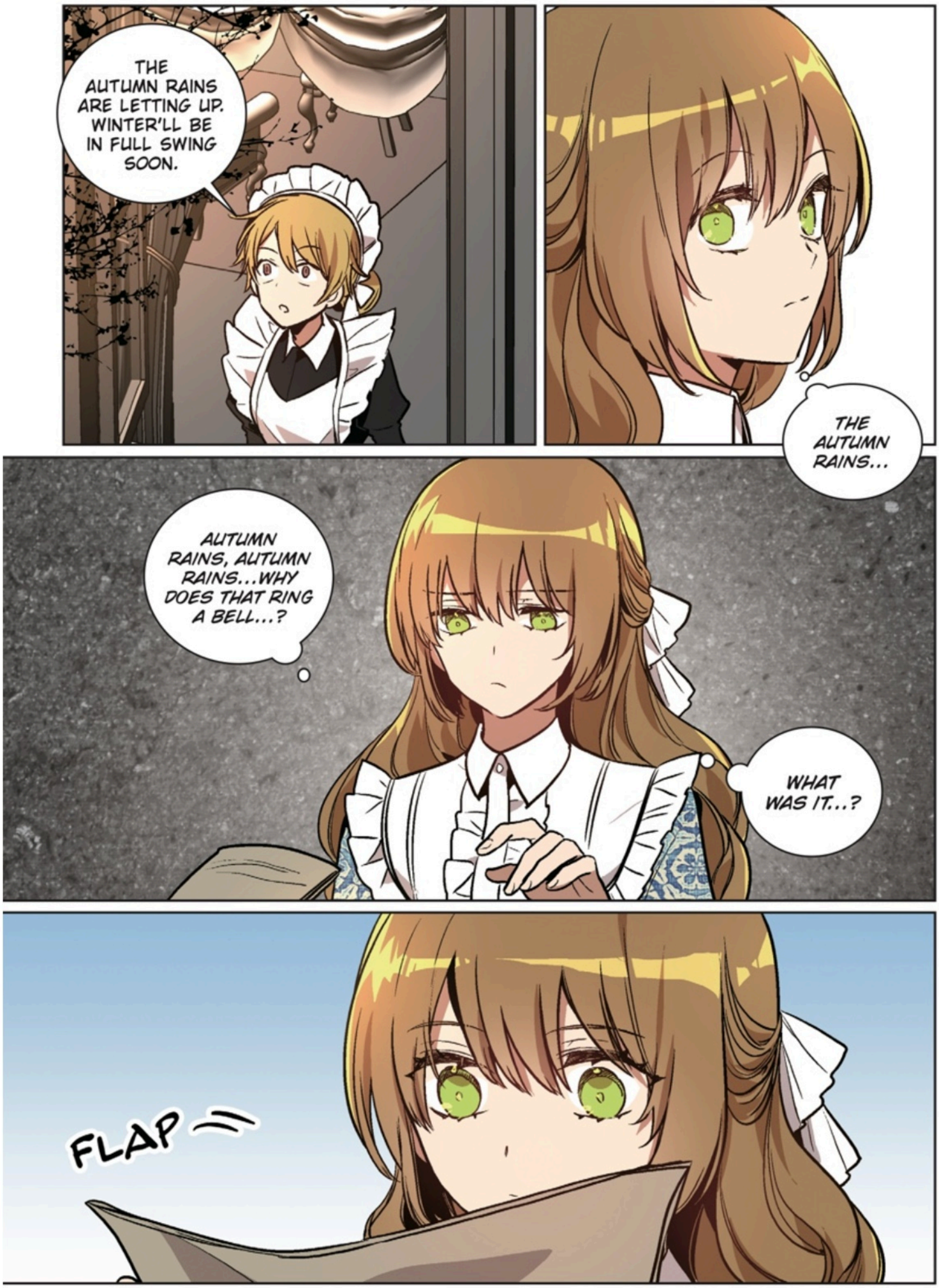

I've readied a spot in the temple for you—no need to be shy, it's a great honor.
When you arrive, I can take you sightseeing in the Holy Domain.
There's even a fifty-meter-tall statue of me that can be seen all the way from...



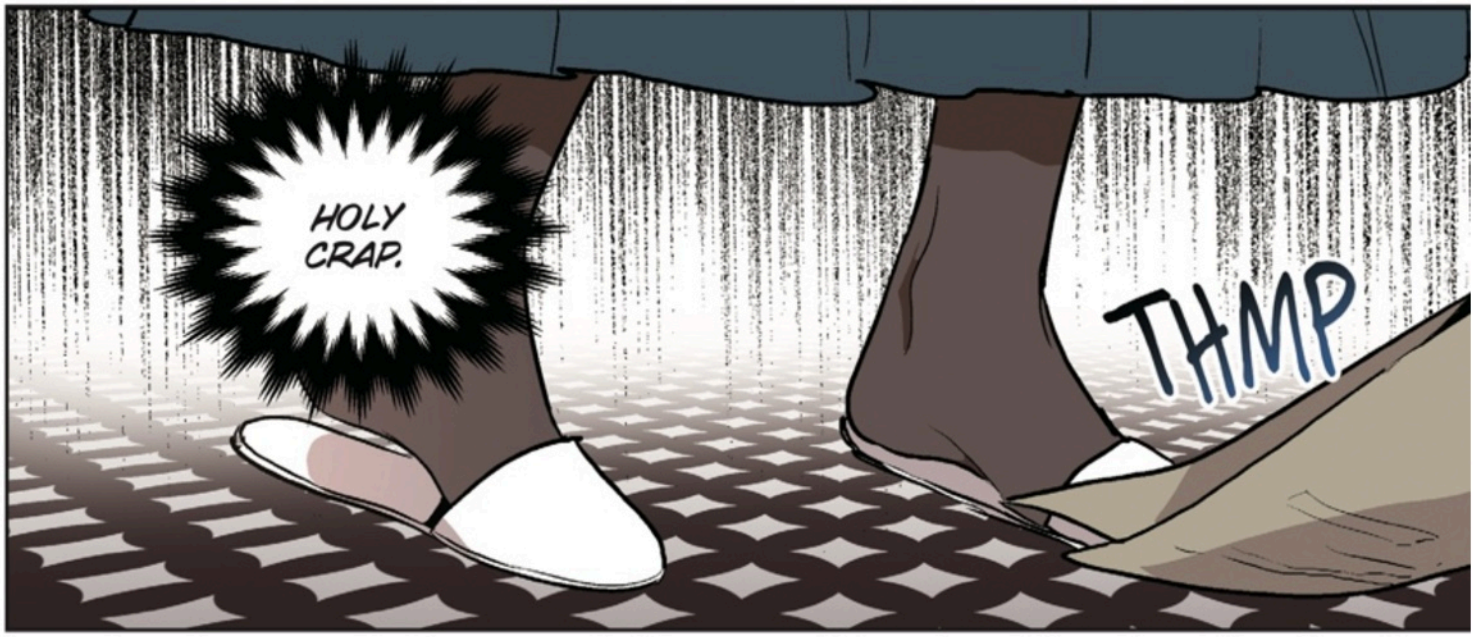
WHIRL


WOOM
MISS?!

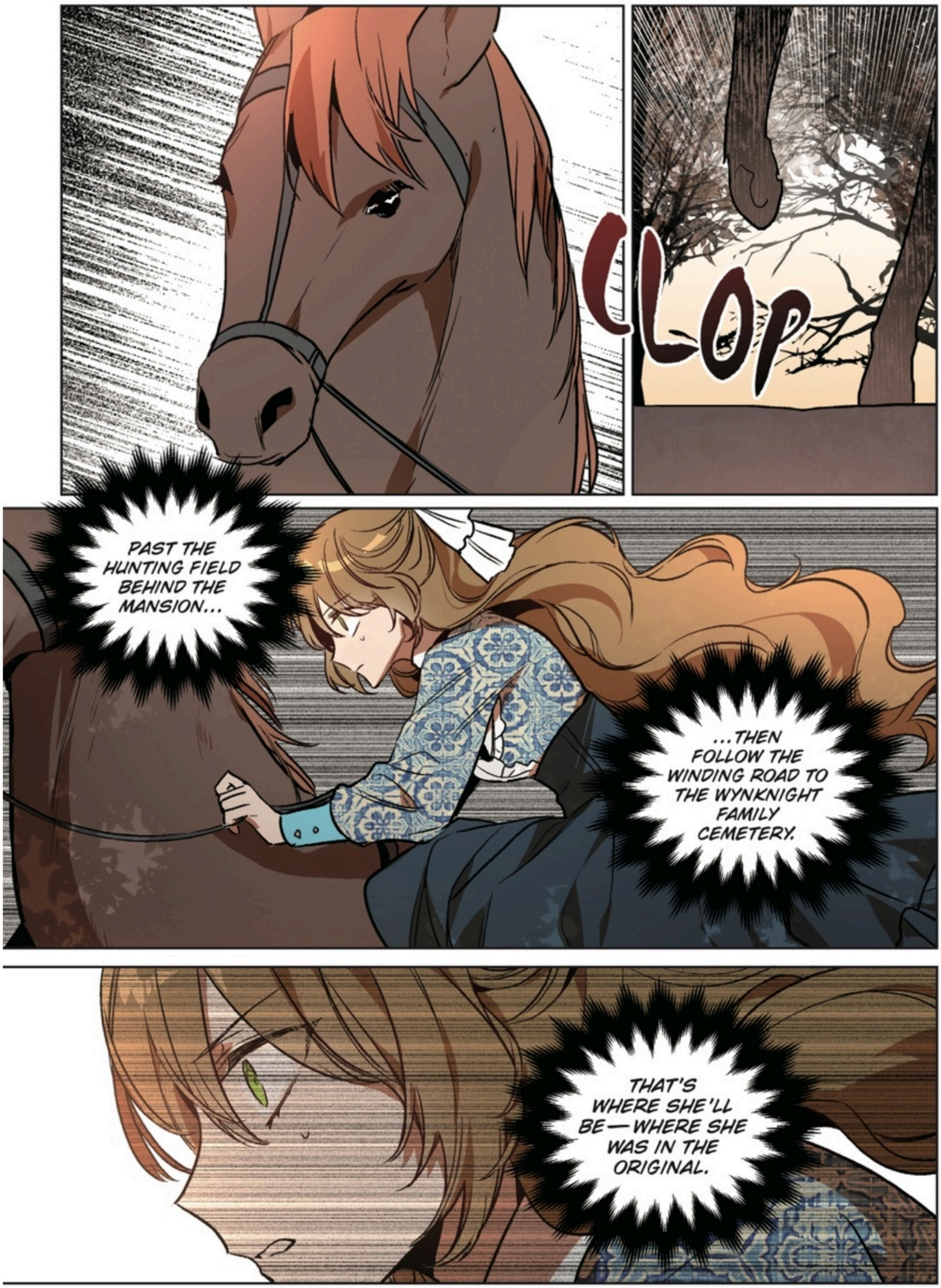

JUST SOME CHAIN MAIL, HAILEY. READING IT WILL BRING BAD LUCK.
...FROM THE HOLY DOMAIN?

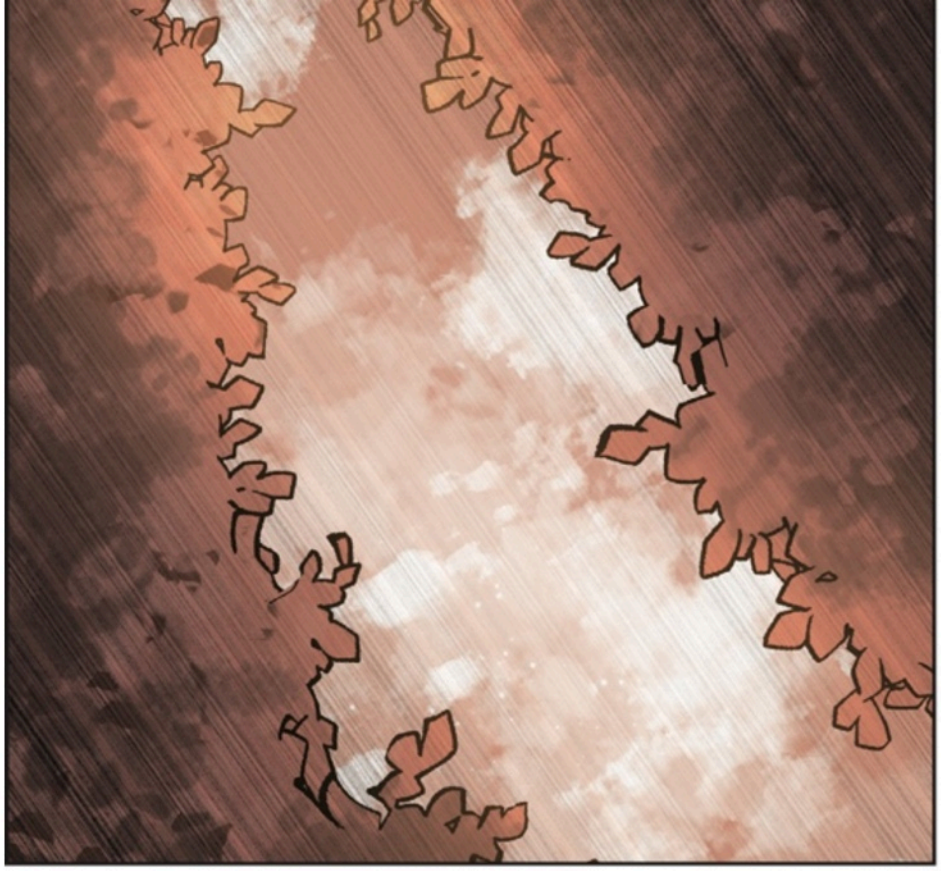

THE AUTUMN RAINS ARE LETTING UP. WINTER'LL BE IN FULL SWING SOON.
THE AUTUMN RAINS...
AUTUMN RAINS, AUTUMN RAINS...WHY DOES THAT RING A BELL...?
WHAT WAS IT...?
FLAP

!
ROYAL ASSEMBLY
AT LAST SET TO ADJOURN
TOMORROW!
BUT WHERE IS THE ROYAL SEAL?


HOLY CRAP.
THMP

HOW DID I TOTALLY FORGET?!
WHISH
MISS?


CLOP
PAST THE HUNTING FIELD BEHIND THE MANSION...
...THEN FOLLOW THE WINDING ROAD TO THE WYNKNIGHT FAMILY CEMETERY.
THAT'S WHERE SHE'LL BE—WHERE SHE WAS IN THE ORIGINAL.



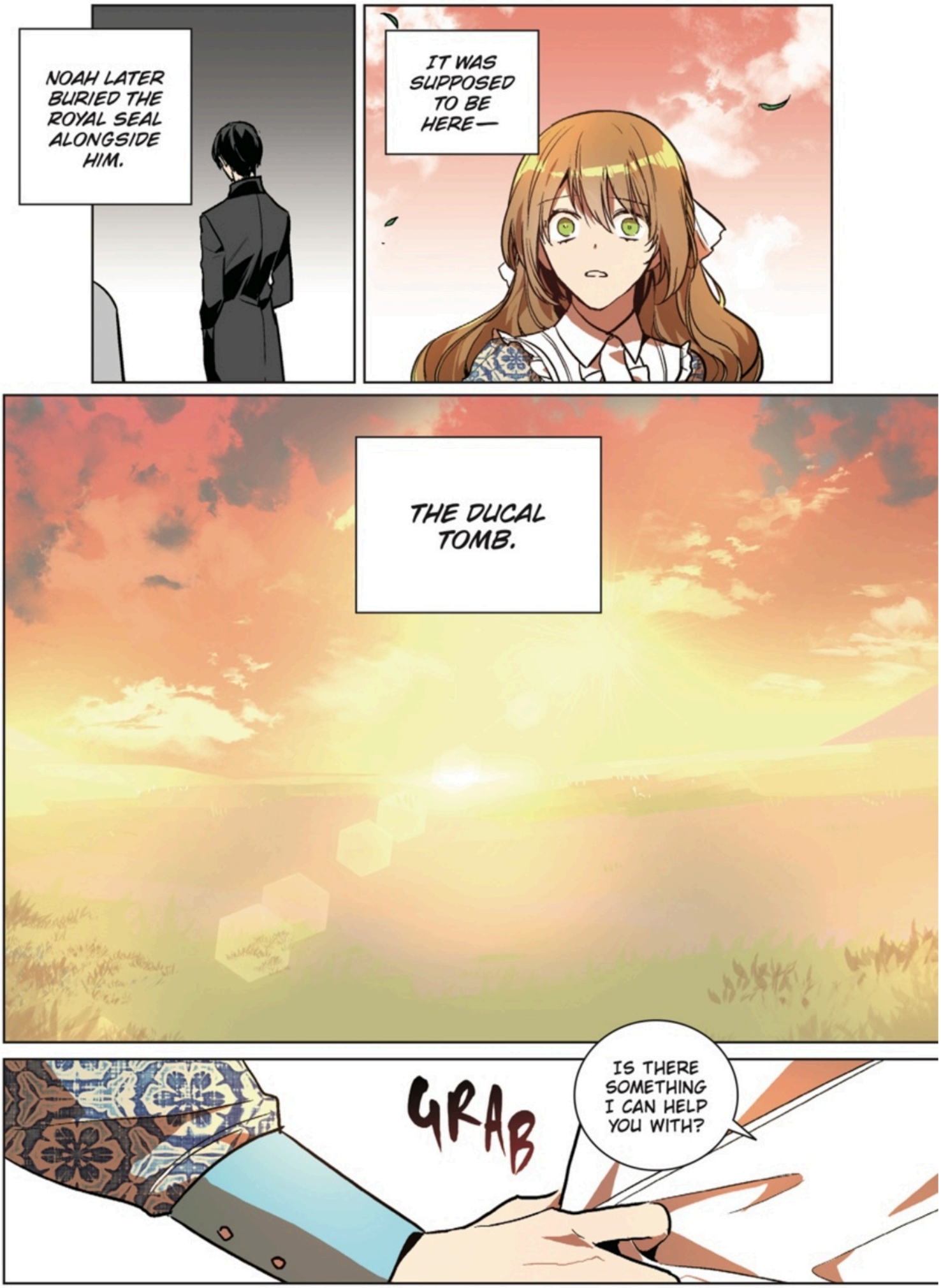
DASH

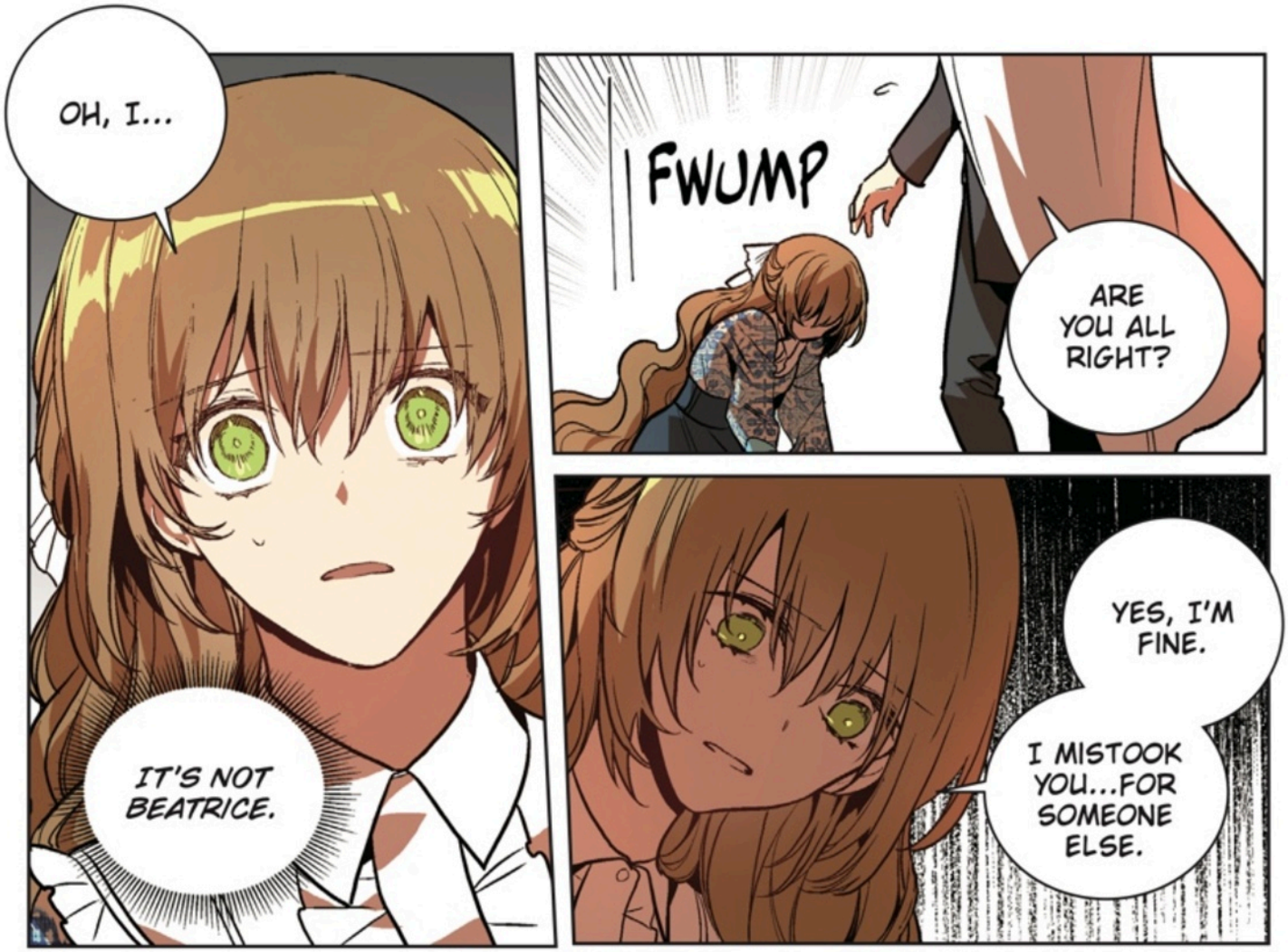
BEATRICE...!!

ROBERT WYNKNIGHT, WHO WAS MEANT TO TAKE THE TITLE OF DUKE INSTEAD OF NOAH, DIED IN AN ACCIDENT.

LEFT BY HER LONESOME, THE LADY OF THE HOUSE PASSED THE TITLE TO NOAH— HER NEPHEW AND SECOND IN LINE TO THE THRONE. THEN, SHE VANISHED.

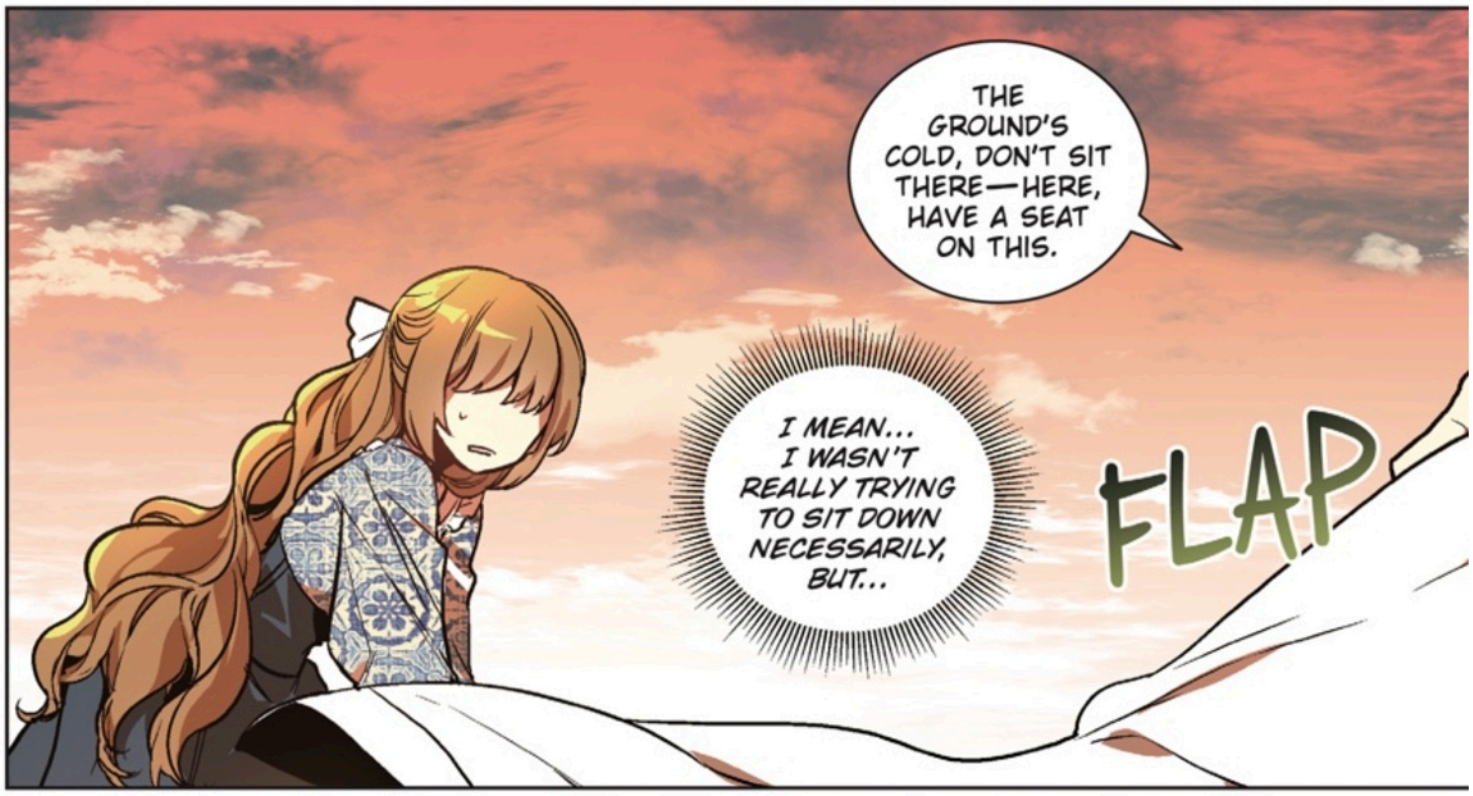
THUS, ROBERT WYNKNIGHT ALONE WAS LAID TO REST ON 31 VANGELIO STREET.


NOAH LATER BURIED THE ROYAL SEAL ALONGSIDE HIM.
IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE HERE—
THE DUCAL TOMB.
GRAB
IS THERE SOMETHING I CAN HELP YOU WITH?


OH, I...
IT'S NOT BEATRICE.
FWUMP
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
YES, I'M FINE.
I MISTOOK YOU...FOR SOMEONE ELSE.

IN THE NOVEL, BEATRICE DEFINITELY SEEKS OUT THIS GRAVE THE DAY BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY ADJOURNS...

SHF

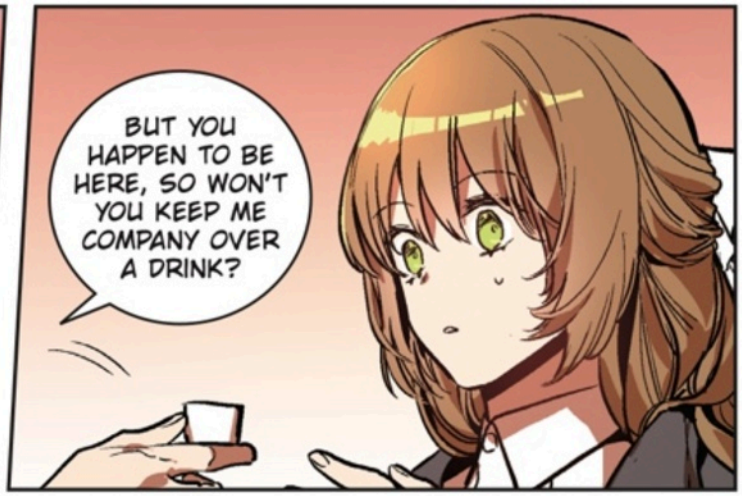

THE GROUND'S COLD, DON'T SIT THERE—HERE, HAVE A SEAT ON THIS.
I MEAN... I WASN'T REALLY TRYING TO SIT DOWN NECESSARILY, BUT...
FLAP

OH... THANK YOU.

PLOP

FWIP
AND NOW WE'RE DRINKING?!

I'D JUST RETURNED AFTER BEING AWAY FOR A WHILE, ONLY TO FIND THE GRAVE OF MY FRIEND GONE.
I WAS LEFT ALONE WITH ONLY THE DRINK I'D BROUGHT TO SHARE WITH HIM.

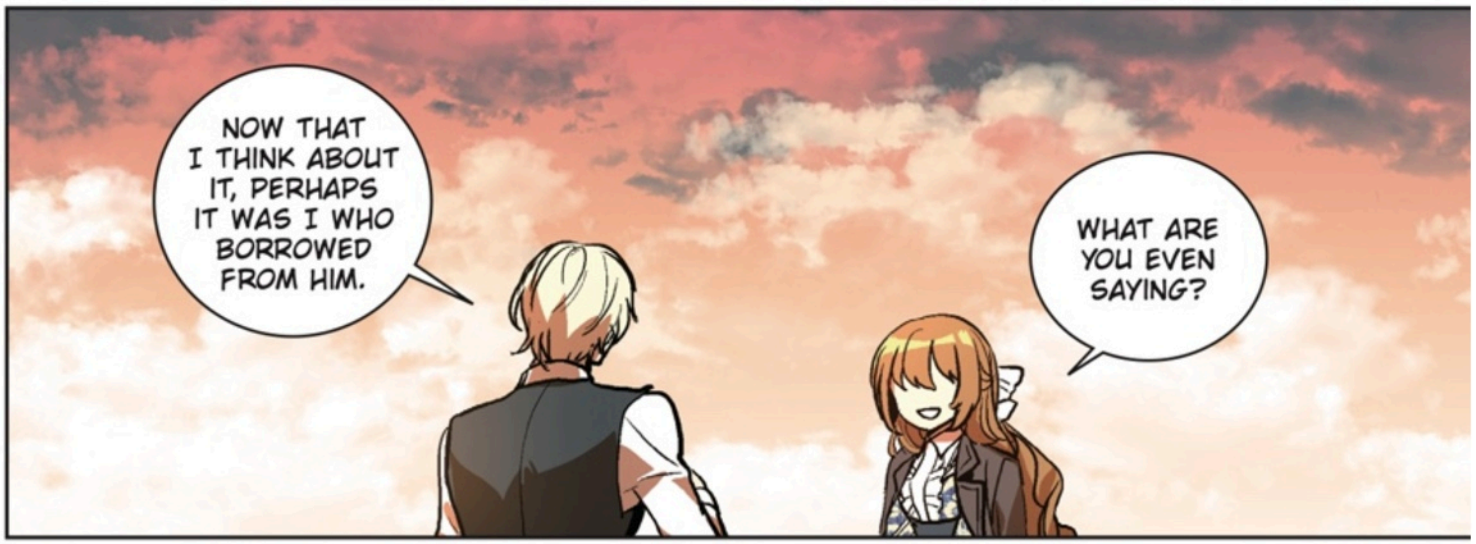

BUT YOU HAPPEN TO BE HERE, SO WON'T YOU KEEP ME COMPANY OVER A DRINK?

WHEN YOU SAY THE GRAVE OF A FRIEND...
DID YOU KNOW ROBERT WYNKNIGHT?

WE WERE QUITE CLOSE. HE LEFT THIS WORLD TOO SOON.
AND TOOK THE COIN I LENT HIM WITH...
SOMEONE FROM THE WYNKNIGHT FAMILY NEEDED TO BORROW MONEY?

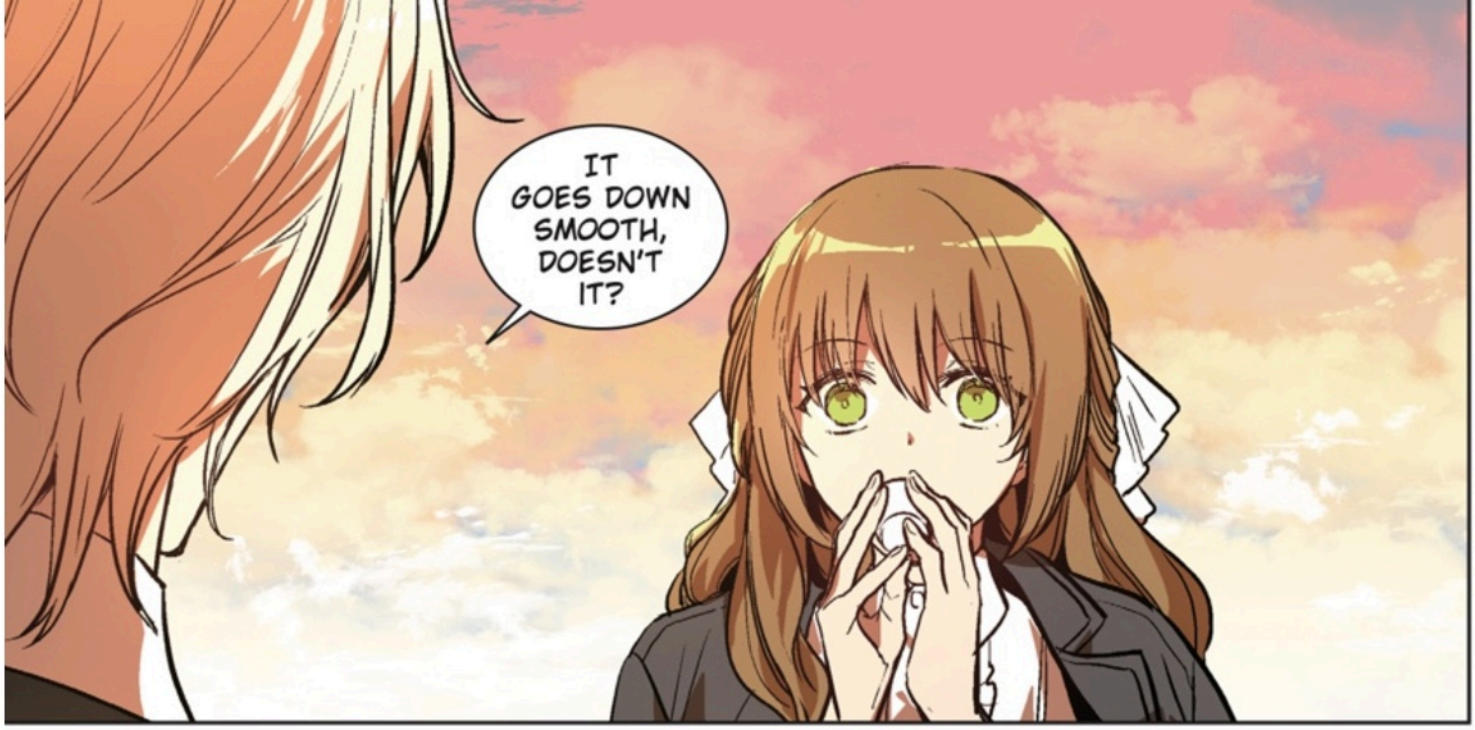
YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME?

NOT ONE BIT.
TINK

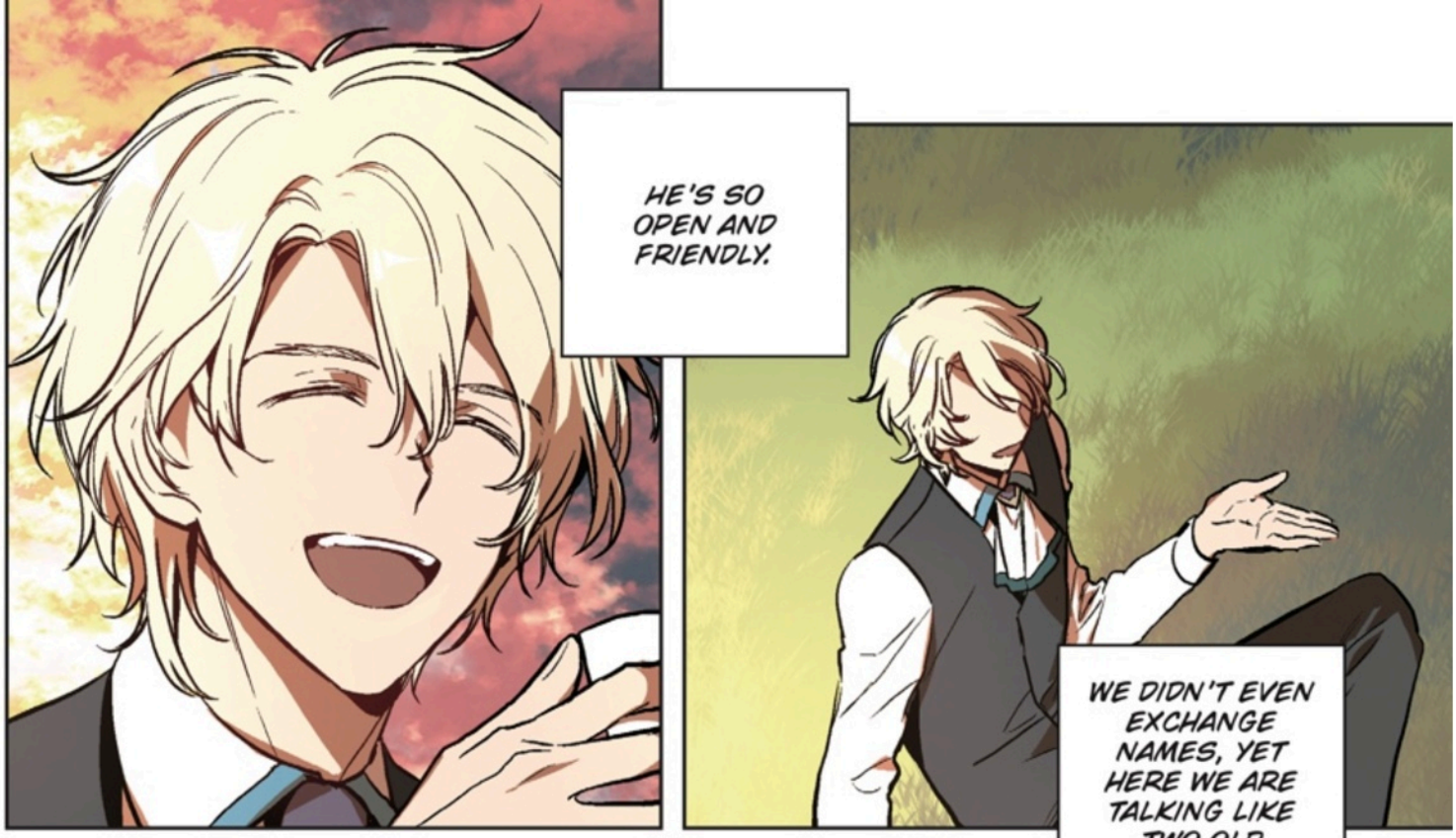

NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT, PERHAPS IT WAS I WHO BORROWED FROM HIM.
WHAT ARE YOU EVEN SAYING?

I MET THE GRAVEKEEPER EARLIER. HE SAID ALL THE WYNKNIGHT GRAVES HAD BEEN MOVED TO THE FAMILY ESTATE IN THE WAKE OF A GRAVE ROBBING.
GRAVE ROBBING...

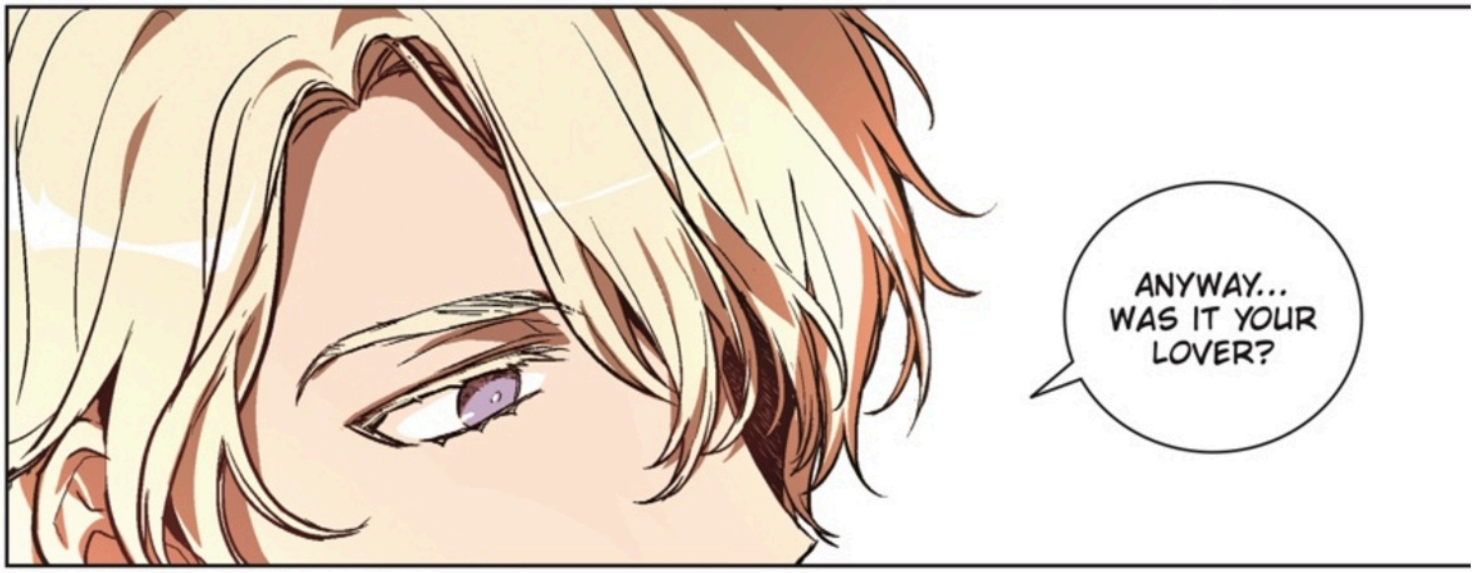
THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN IN THE BOOK. MUST BE 'COS OF ME.
I GUESS THEY USED TOMB RAIDING AS AN EXCUSE TO MOVE THE GRAVES, AND WITH THEM, THE ROYAL SEAL...

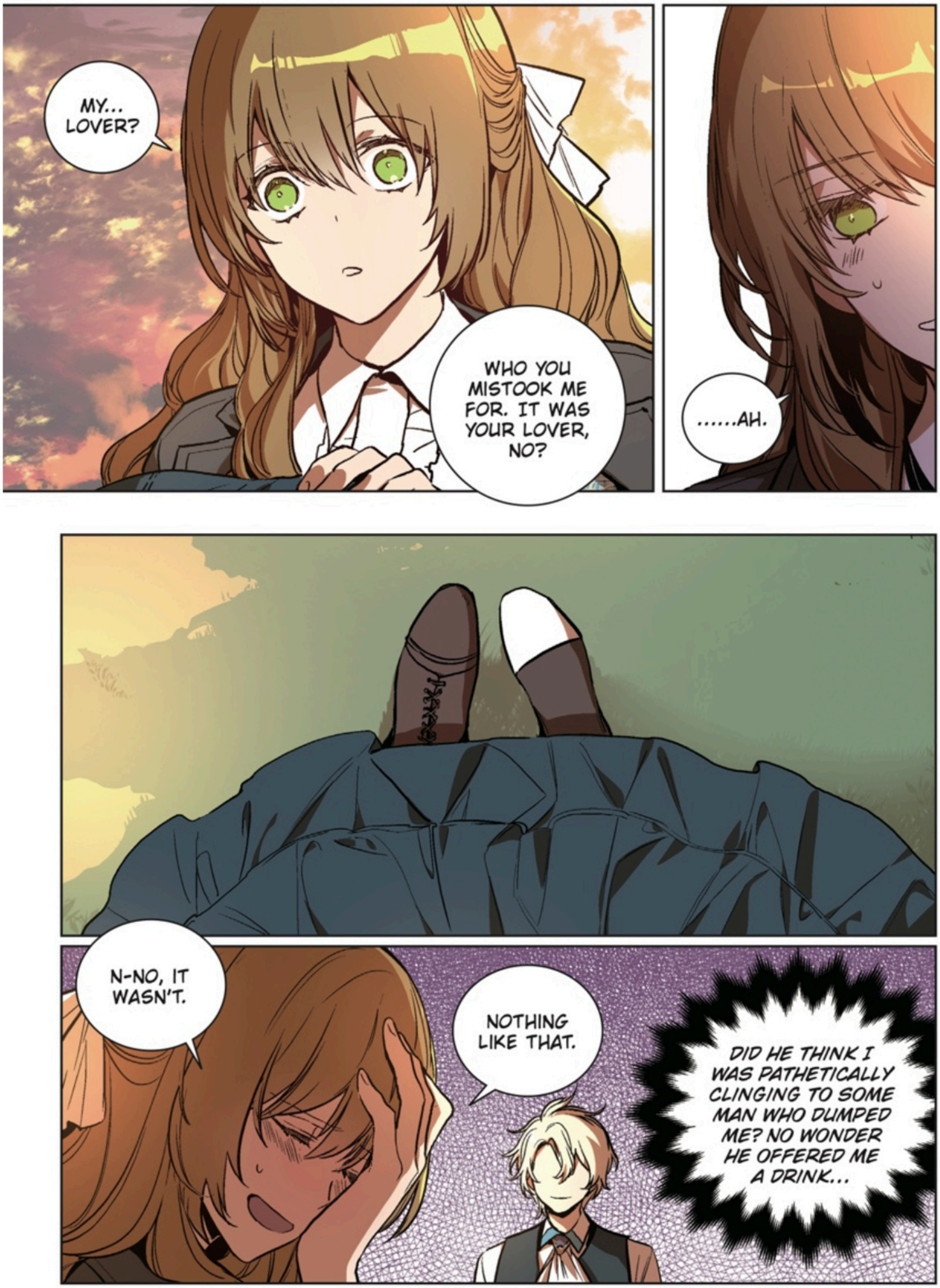

IT GOES DOWN SMOOTH, DOESN'T IT?

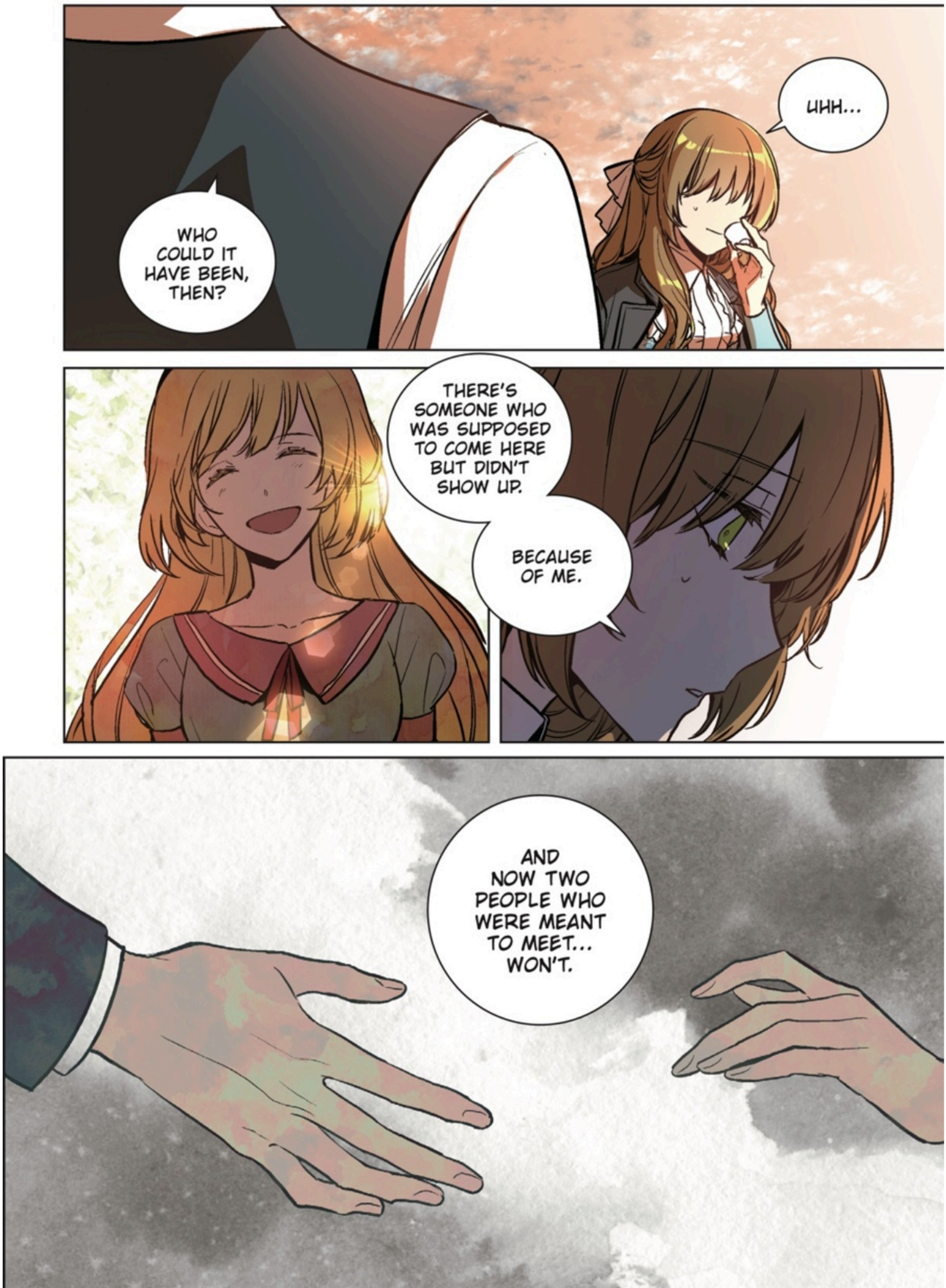
YEAH, IT DOES.


HE'S SO OPEN AND FRIENDLY.
WE DIDN'T EVEN EXCHANGE NAMES, YET HERE WE ARE TALKING LIKE TWO OLD FRIENDS...

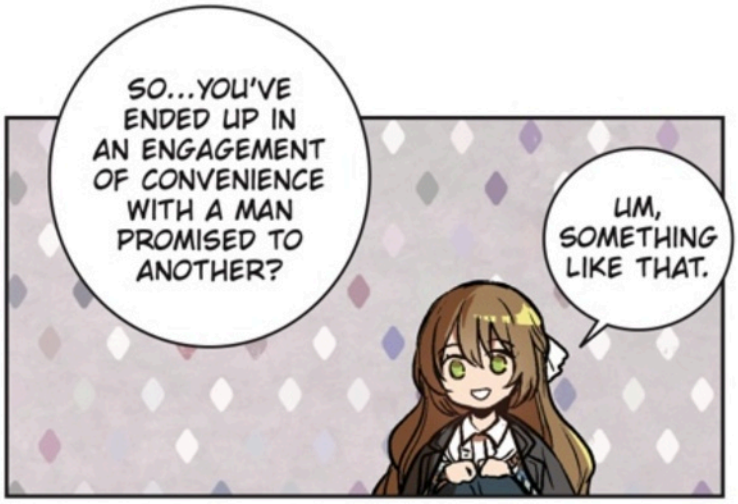
...AND SO, NEEDLESS TO SAY, I CAN'T SHOW MY FACE IN THE DUKEDOM OF BELLIA AGAIN.
WERE I TO BE ARRESTED ONCE MORE... WELL, THEY'D LIKELY BEHEAD ME. OR FRY ME UP IN OIL.
HA, FRY YOU IN OIL?


ANYWAY... WAS IT YOUR LOVER?

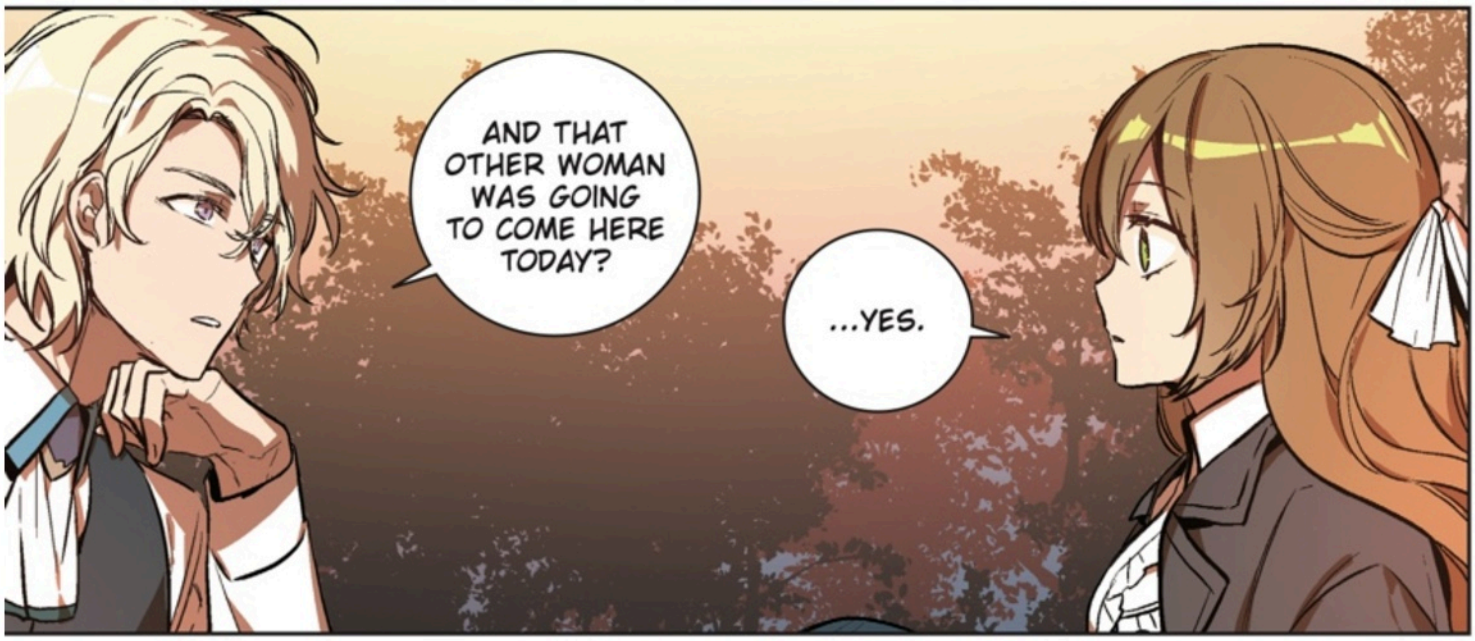

MY... LOVER?
WHO YOU MISTOOK ME FOR. IT WAS YOUR LOVER, NO?
.....AH.
N-NO, IT WASN'T.
NOTHING LIKE THAT.
DID HE THINK I WAS PATHETICALLY CLINGING TO SOME MAN WHO DUMPED ME? NO WONDER HE OFFERED ME A DRINK...


WHO COULD IT HAVE BEEN, THEN?
UHH...
THERE'S SOMEONE WHO WAS SUPPOSED TO COME HERE BUT DIDN'T SHOW UP.
BECAUSE OF ME.
AND NOW TWO PEOPLE WHO WERE MEANT TO MEET... WON'T.

.....


SO...YOU'VE ENDED UP IN AN ENGAGEMENT OF CONVENIENCE WITH A MAN PROMISED TO ANOTHER?
UM, SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

IT'S OKAY TO LET HIM THINK THAT, RIGHT? IT'S NOT TOO FAR FROM THE TRUTH.

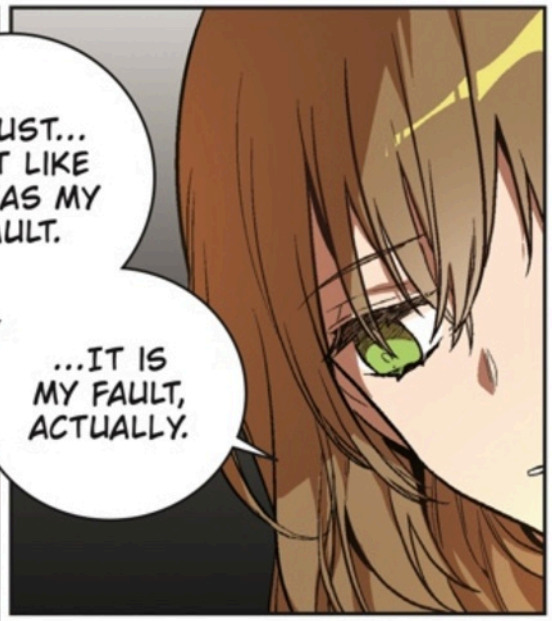

AND THAT OTHER WOMAN WAS GOING TO COME HERE TODAY?
...YES.

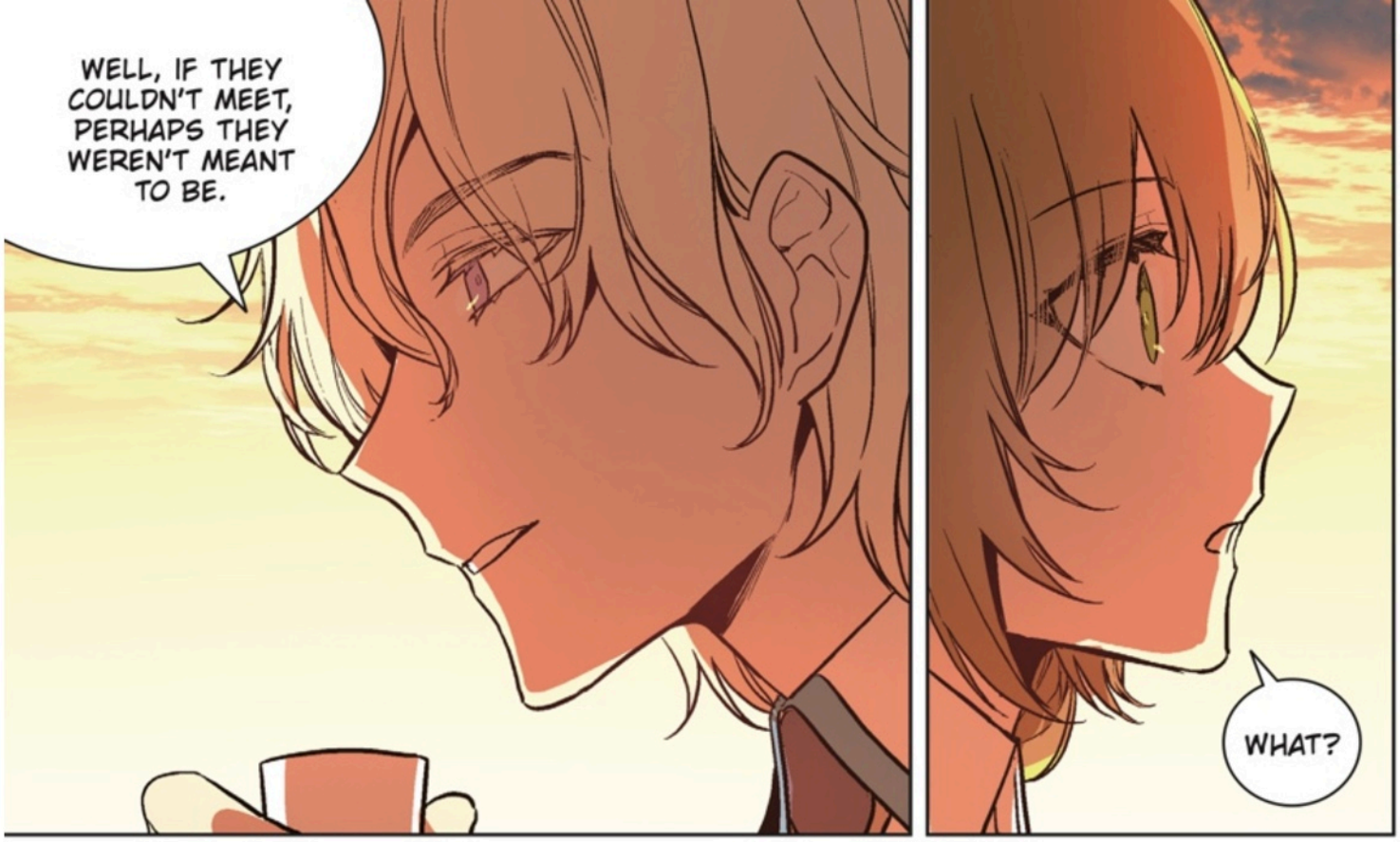
AND YOU INTENDED TO TAKE HER TO MEET HIM?
YEAH, THAT WAS THE PLAN. BUT NOW I CAN'T...

BUT WHY?

HUH?

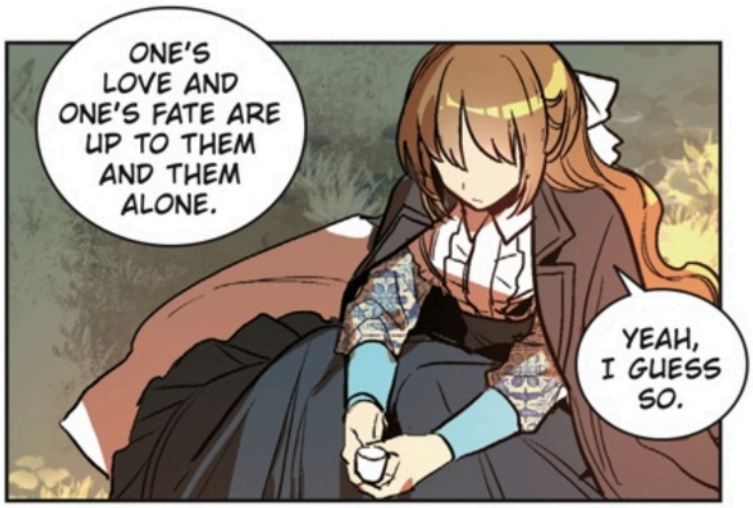
WHY TAKE SUCH A THING UPON YOURSELF, I MEAN.


I JUST... FELT LIKE IT WAS MY FAULT.
...IT IS MY FAULT, ACTUALLY.


WELL, IF THEY COULDN'T MEET, PERHAPS THEY WEREN'T MEANT TO BE.
WHAT?

I DON'T KNOW THE DETAILS, BUT...
WOULDN'T YOU AGREE?
PSHT, COME ON.
...YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE. YOU HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.

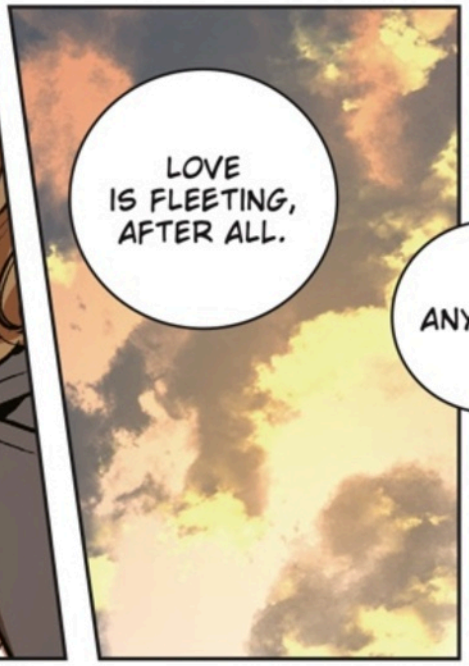
TELL THOSE TWO TO FIGURE THINGS OUT FOR THEM-SELVES.


ONE'S LOVE AND ONE'S FATE ARE UP TO THEM AND THEM ALONE.
YEAH, I GUESS SO.

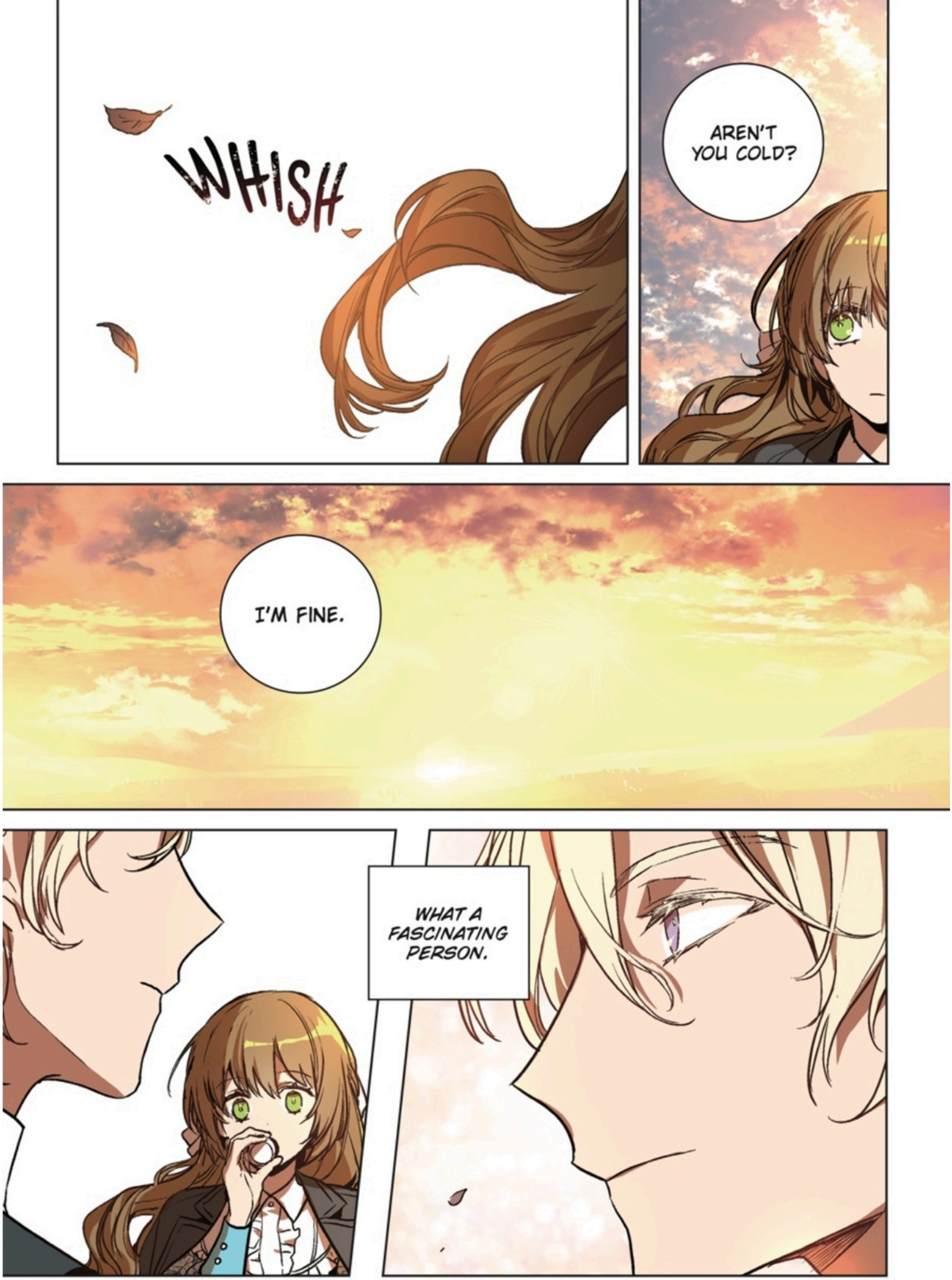
IN FACT, I'M ONLY HERE NOW BECAUSE I TOOK MY SURVIVAL INTO MY OWN HANDS.

YOU HAVE QUITE THE WAY WITH WORDS.

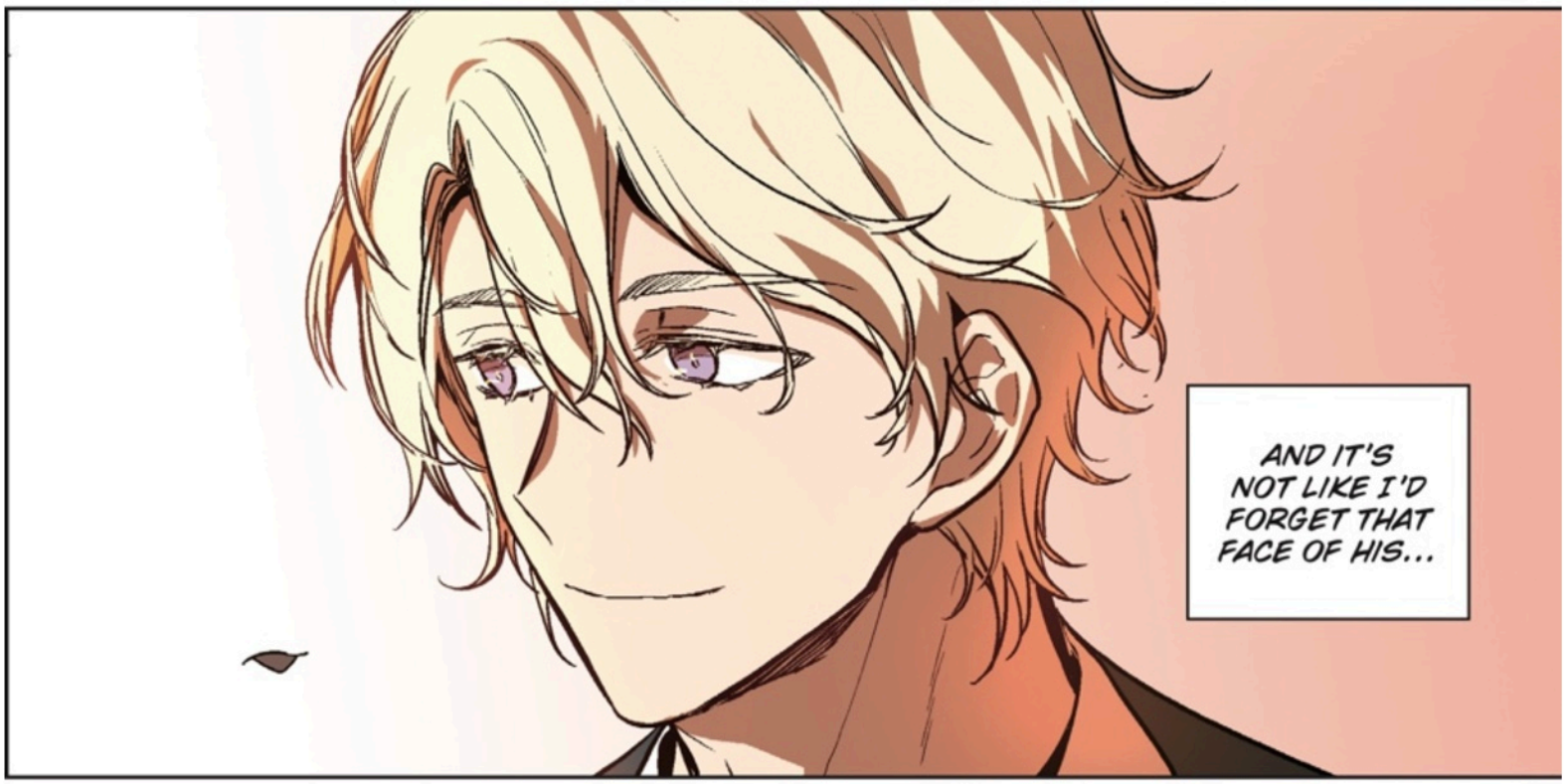
I DO, DON'T I?

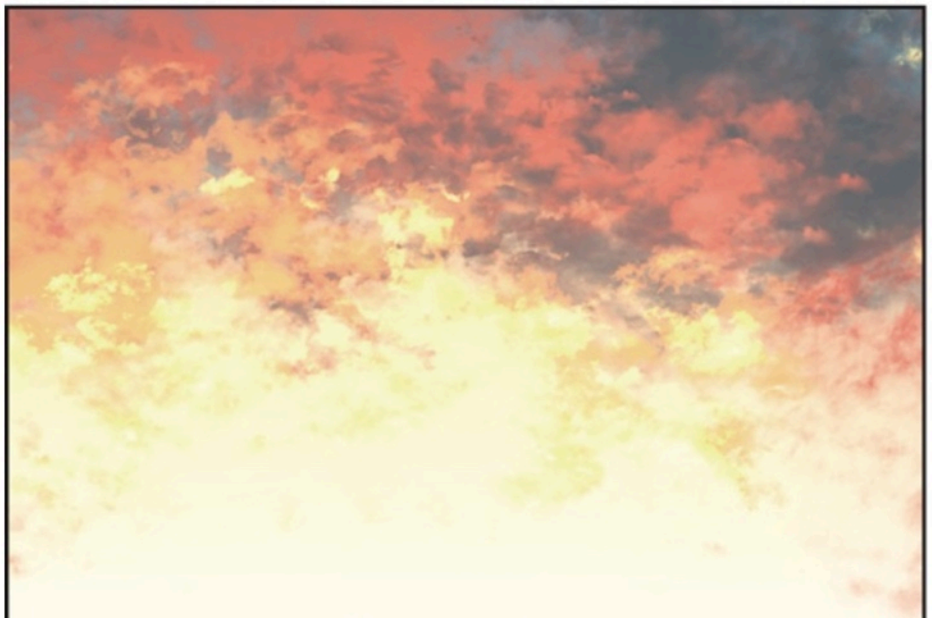

LOVE IS FLEETING, AFTER ALL.

ANYWAY...

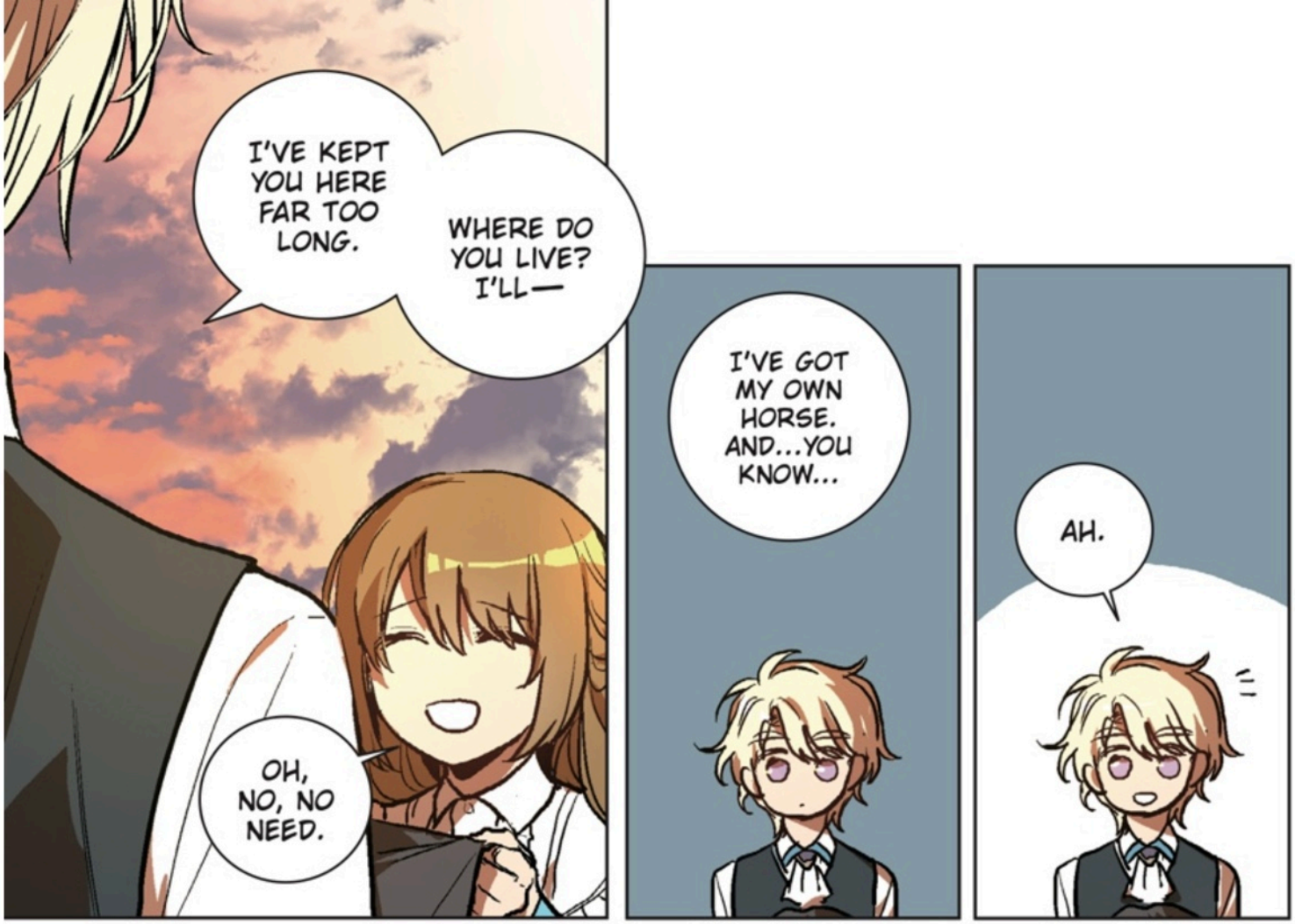

WHISH
AREN'T YOU COLD?
I'M FINE.
WHAT A FASCINATING PERSON.

WHY AM I GETTING DÉJÀ VU?
I CAN'T FOR THE LIFE OF ME RECALL WHERE I'VE SEEN HIM BEFORE.


AND IT'S NOT LIKE I'D FORGET THAT FACE OF HIS...

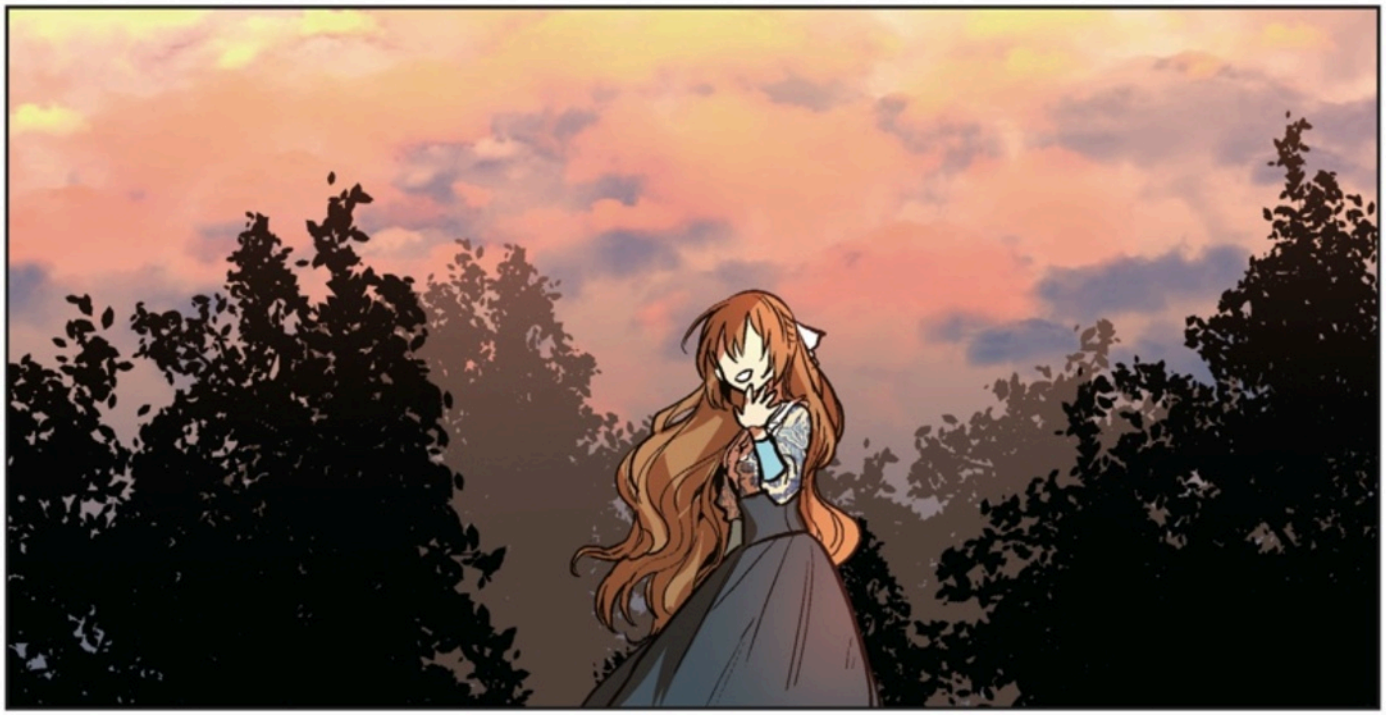


OH DEAR.

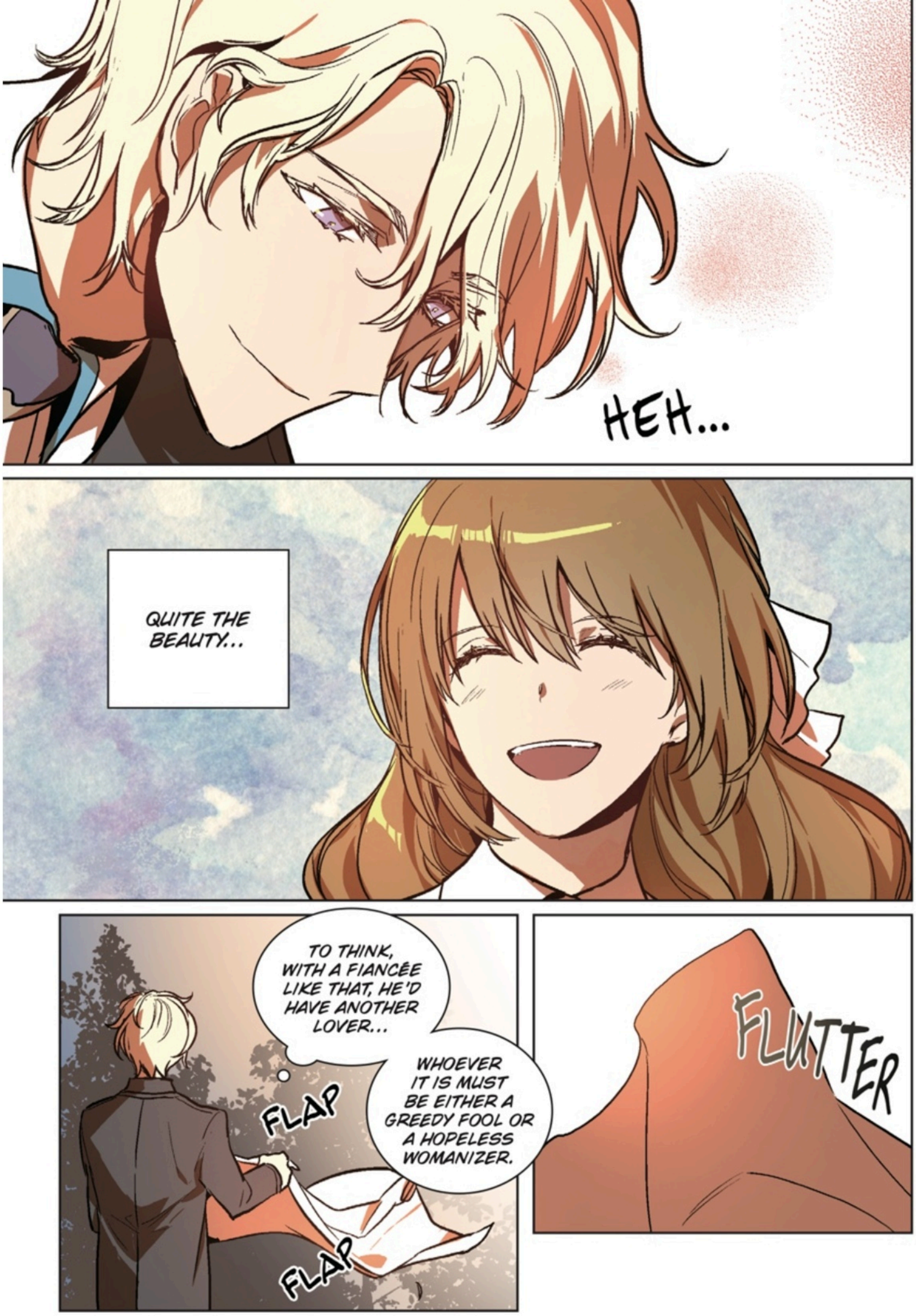

I'VE KEPT YOU HERE FAR TOO LONG.
WHERE DO YOU LIVE? I'LL—
OH, NO, NO NEED.
I'VE GOT MY OWN HORSE. AND...YOU KNOW...
AH.

STROLLING UP TO YOUR HOUSE WITH A STRANGE MAN WOULD CAUSE TROUBLE. A PITY.
IT REALLY IS TOO BAD.

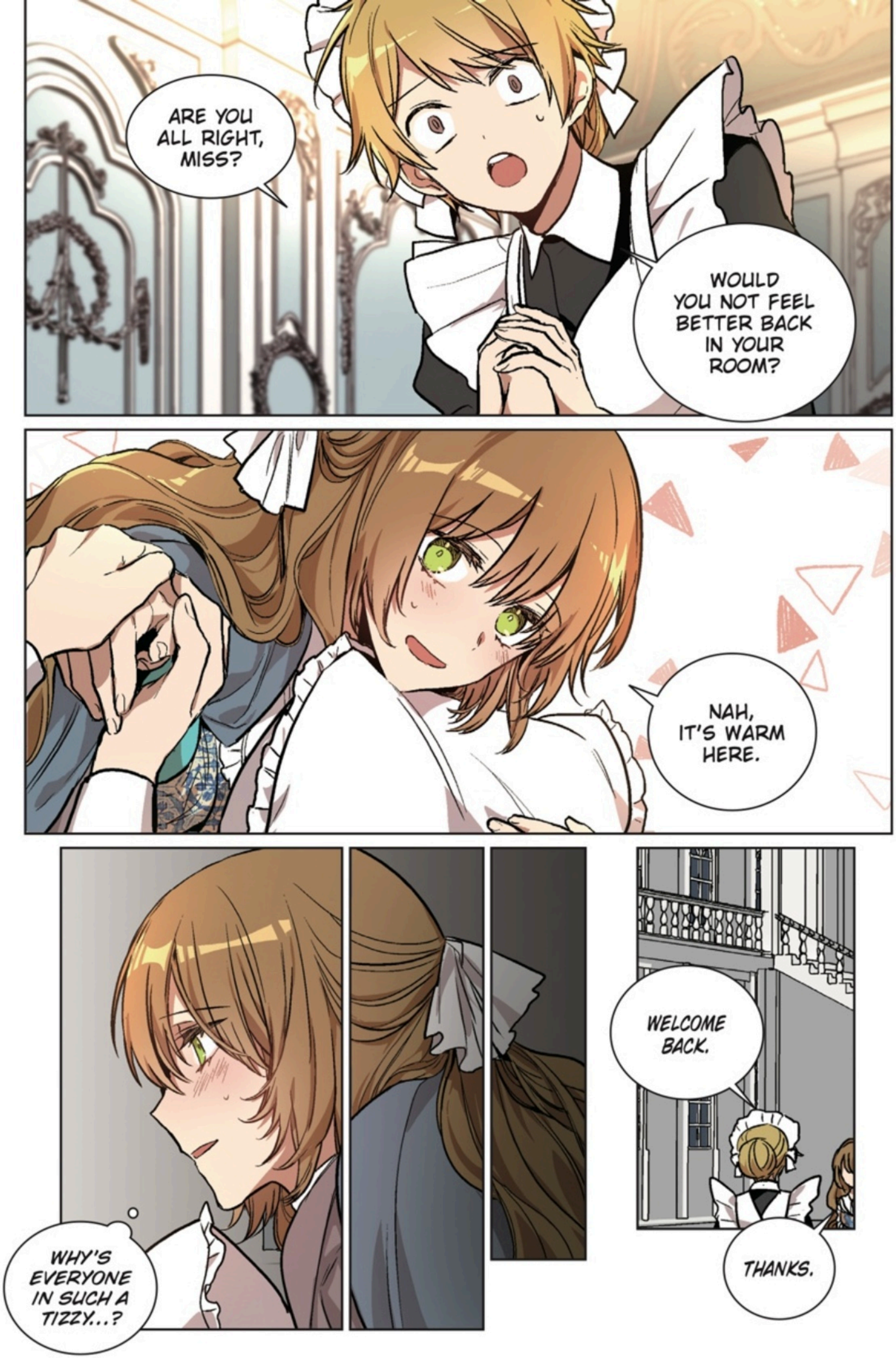
THANK YOU FOR TODAY.
NOT A PROBLEM.

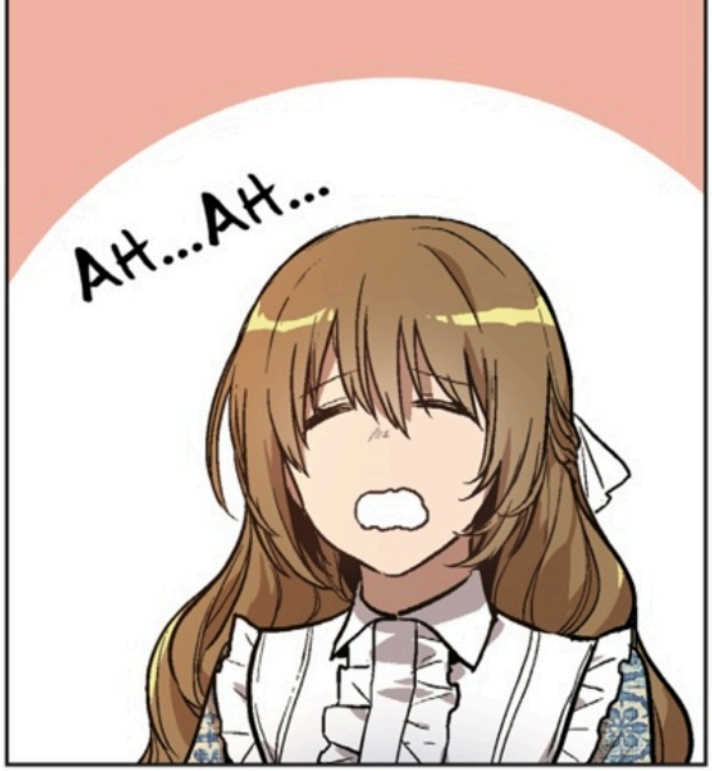


SHF

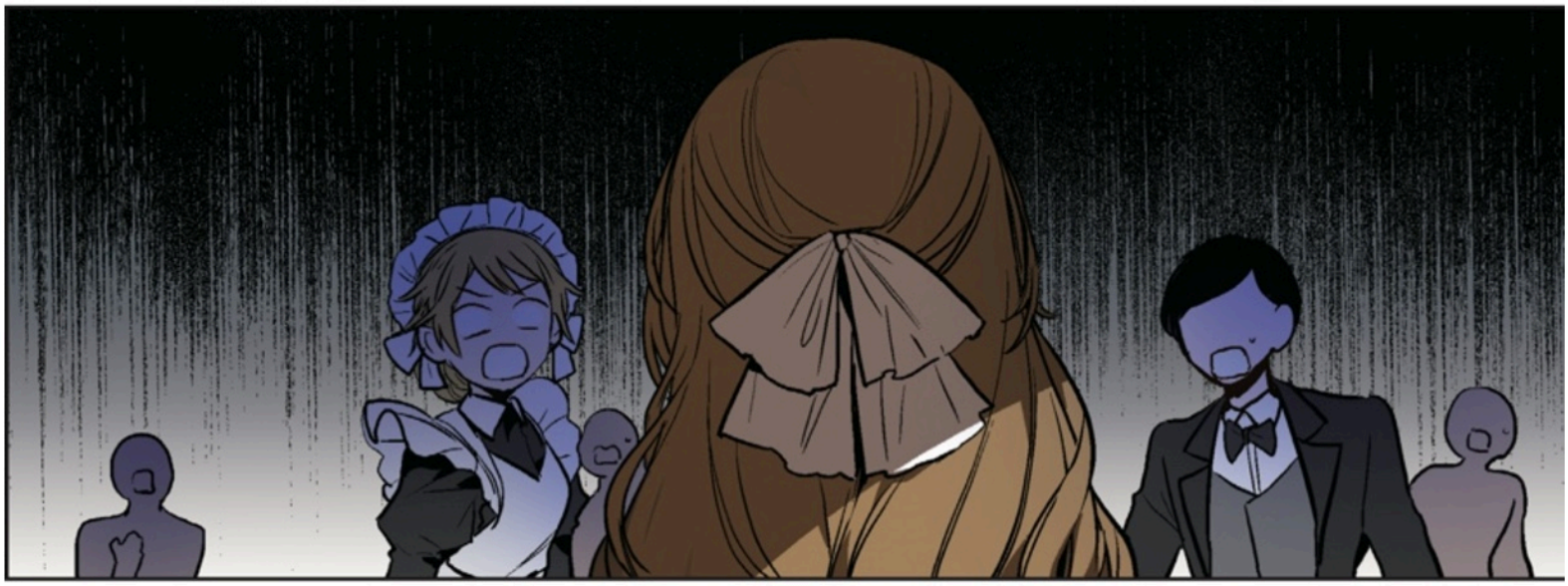

HEH...
QUITE THE BEAUTY...
TO THINK, WITH A FIANCÉE LIKE THAT, HE'D HAVE ANOTHER LOVER...
WHOEVER IT IS MUST BE EITHER A GREEDY FOOL OR A HOPELESS WOMANIZER.
FLAP
FLAP
FLUTTER

COME TO THINK OF IT, I DIDN'T EVEN ASK HER NAME.
HMM.
WELL, IT'S NOT LIKE WE'LL MEET AGAIN ANYWAY.

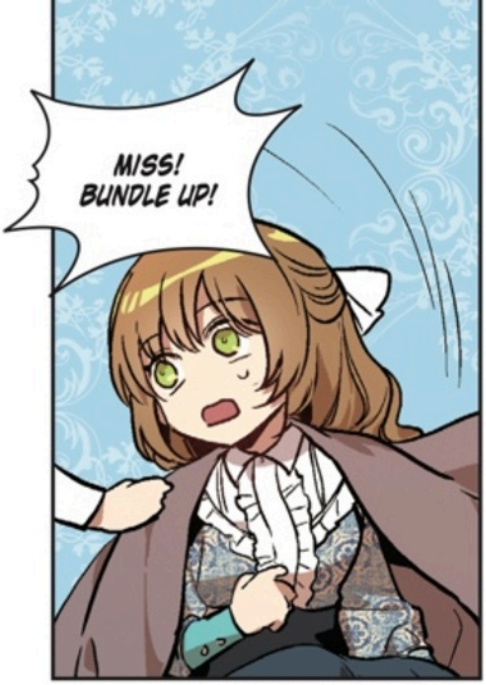

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, MISS?
WOULD YOU NOT FEEL BETTER BACK IN YOUR ROOM?
NAH, IT'S WARM HERE.
WHY'S EVERYONE IN SUCH A TIZZY...?
WELCOME BACK.
THANKS.


AH...AH...

ACHOO!



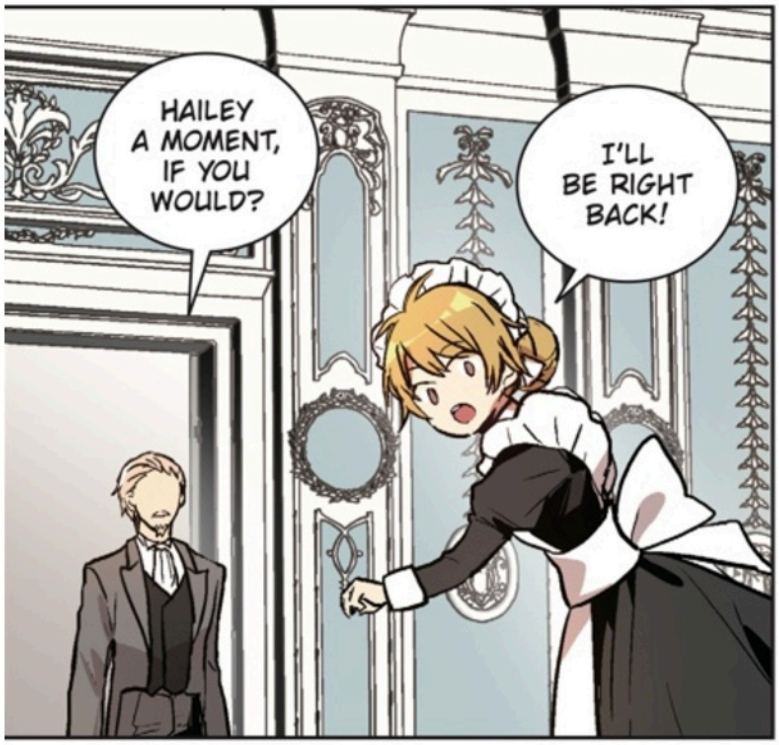
DOCTOR—!!!

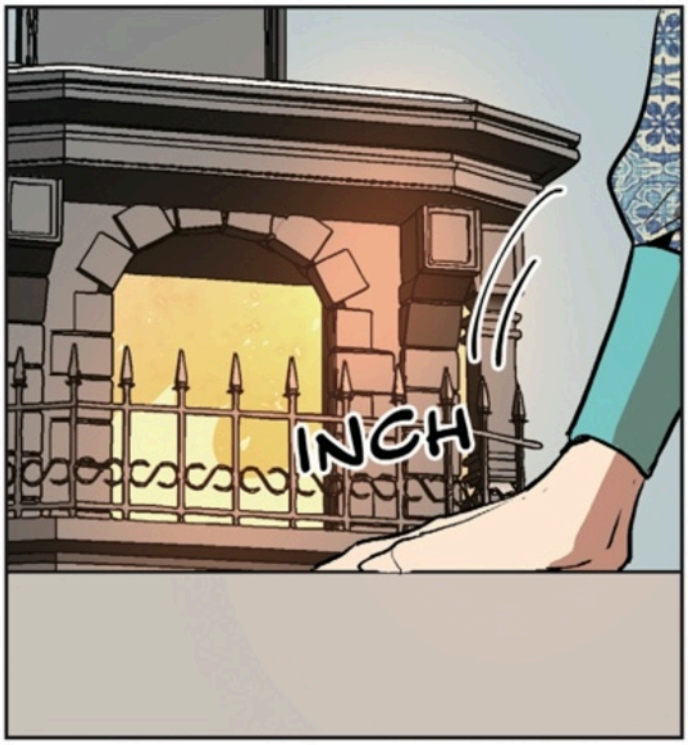

MISS! BUNDLE UP!

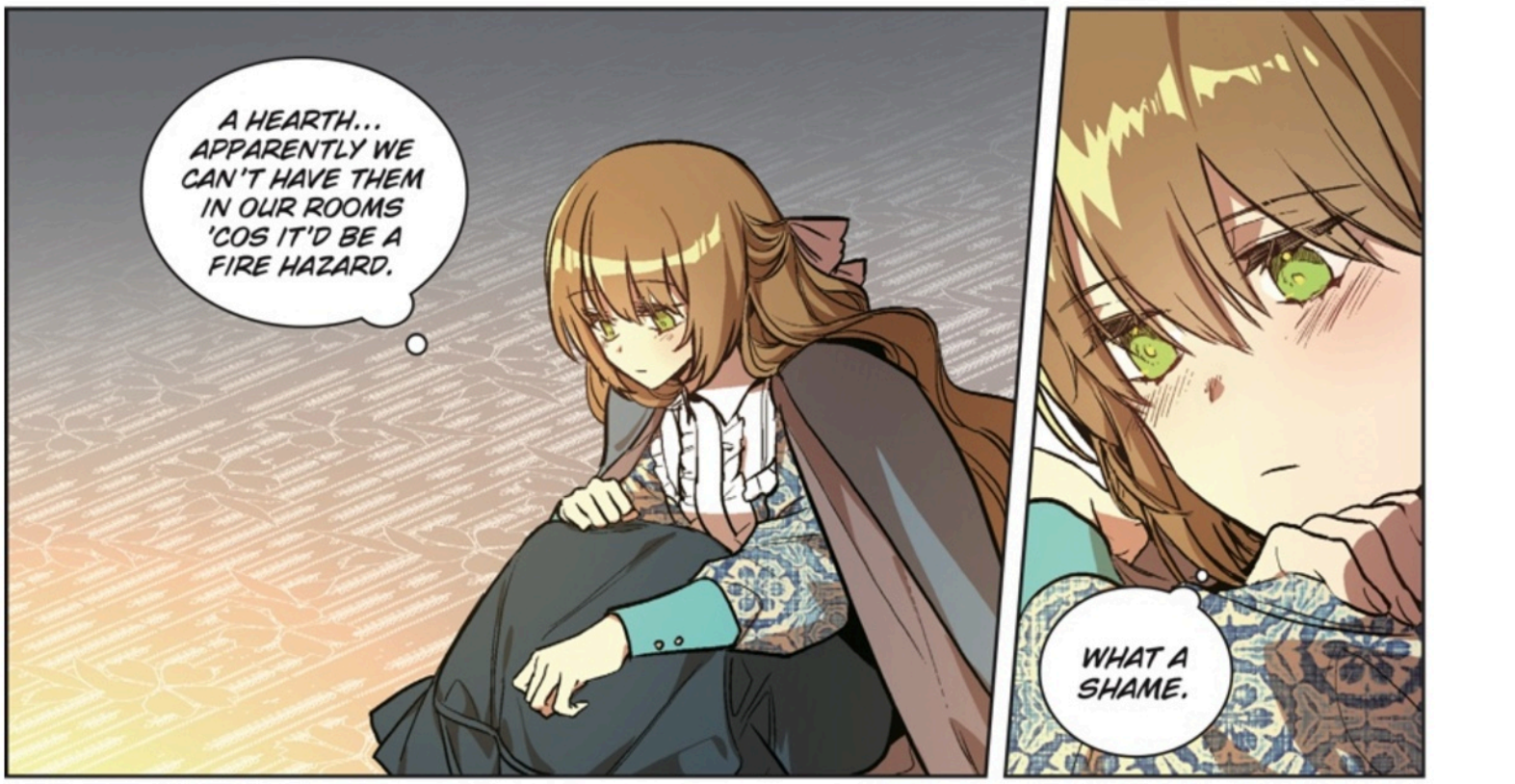
DRINK! IT'S A SPECIAL RECIPE, GOOD FOR COLDS!

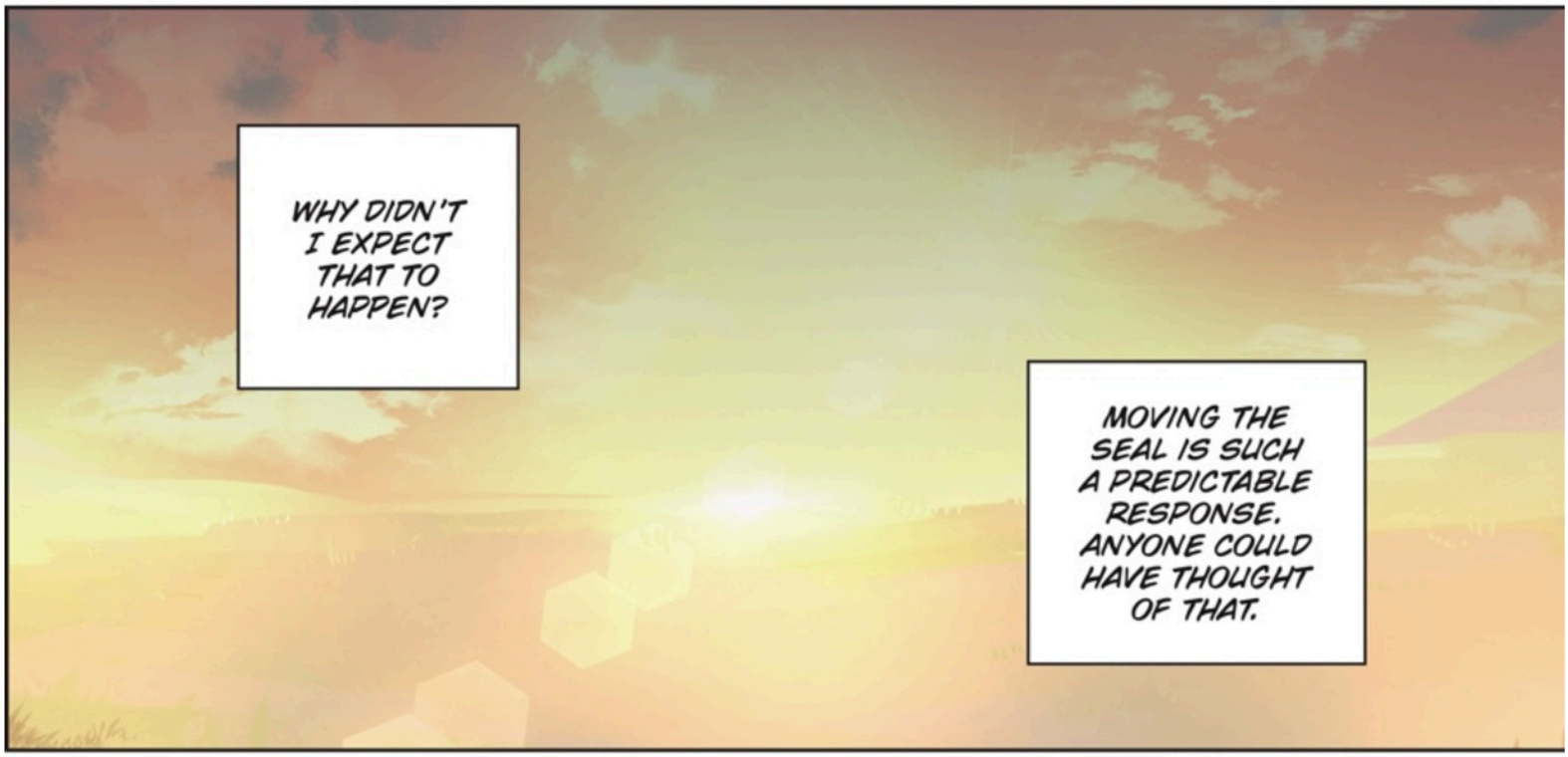
YOU'RE FREEZING! LET ME WARM YOUR HANDS!

I'M BEING TOTALLY CODDLED RIGHT NOW.
...IT'S KINDA EMBARRASS-ING.

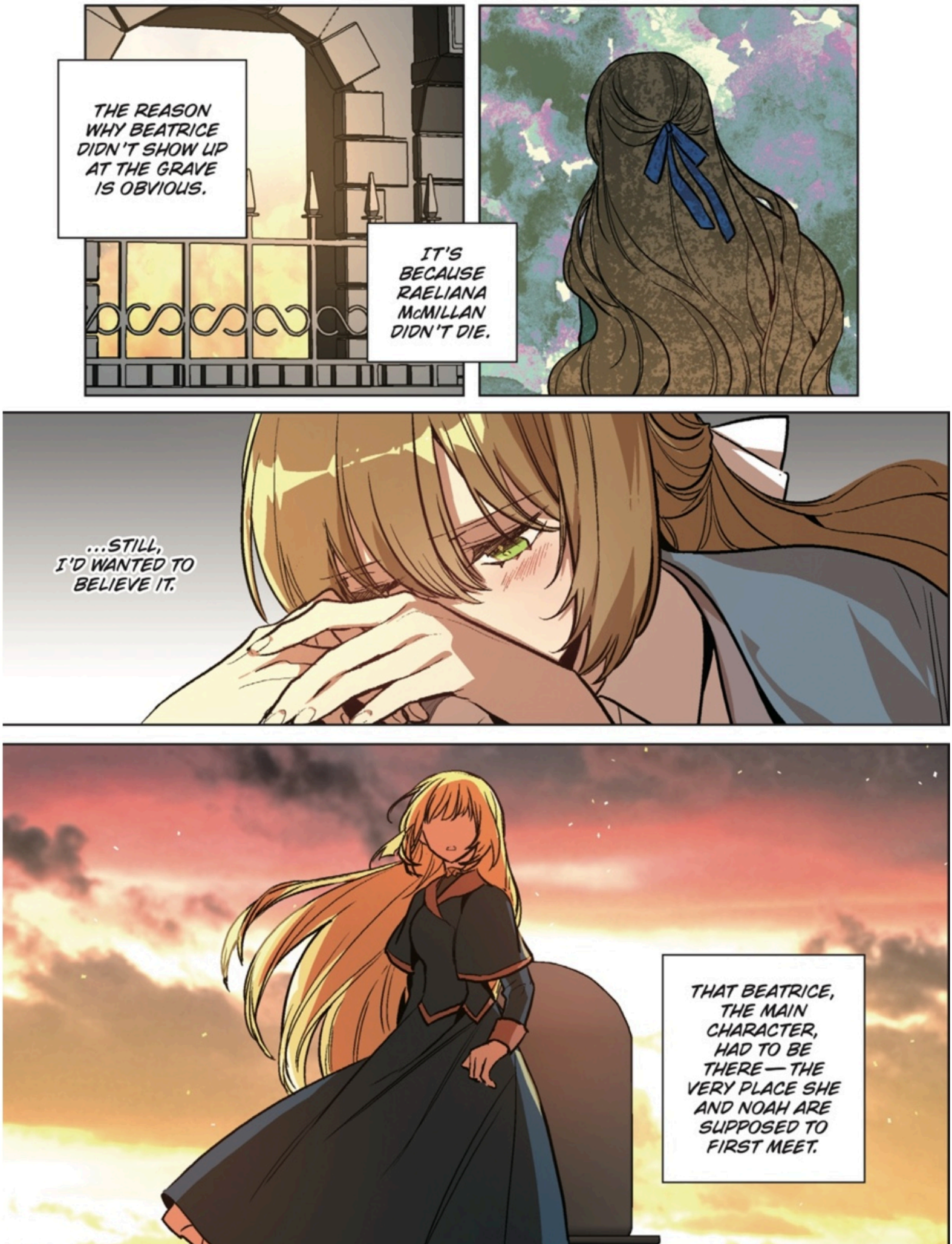

HAILEY A MOMENT, IF YOU WOULD?
I'LL BE RIGHT BACK!


INCH


A HEARTH... APPARENTLY WE CAN'T HAVE THEM IN OUR ROOMS 'COS IT'D BE A FIRE HAZARD.
WHAT A SHAME.


WHY DIDN'T I EXPECT THAT TO HAPPEN?
MOVING THE SEAL IS SUCH A PREDICTABLE RESPONSE. ANYONE COULD HAVE THOUGHT OF THAT.

IS THE FUTURE GONNA BE COMPLETELY DIFFERENT NOW?


THE REASON WHY BEATRICE DIDN'T SHOW UP AT THE GRAVE IS OBVIOUS.
IT'S BECAUSE RAELIANA McMILLAN DIDN'T DIE.
...STILL, I'D WANTED TO BELIEVE IT.
THAT BEATRICE, THE MAIN CHARACTER, HAD TO BE THERE — THE VERY PLACE SHE AND NOAH ARE SUPPOSED TO FIRST MEET.

I GUESS THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO NOW.

SHIVER

I WAS IN SUCH A RUSH I FORGOT TO LAYER UP, AND NOW I'VE ENDED UP WITH A COLD...

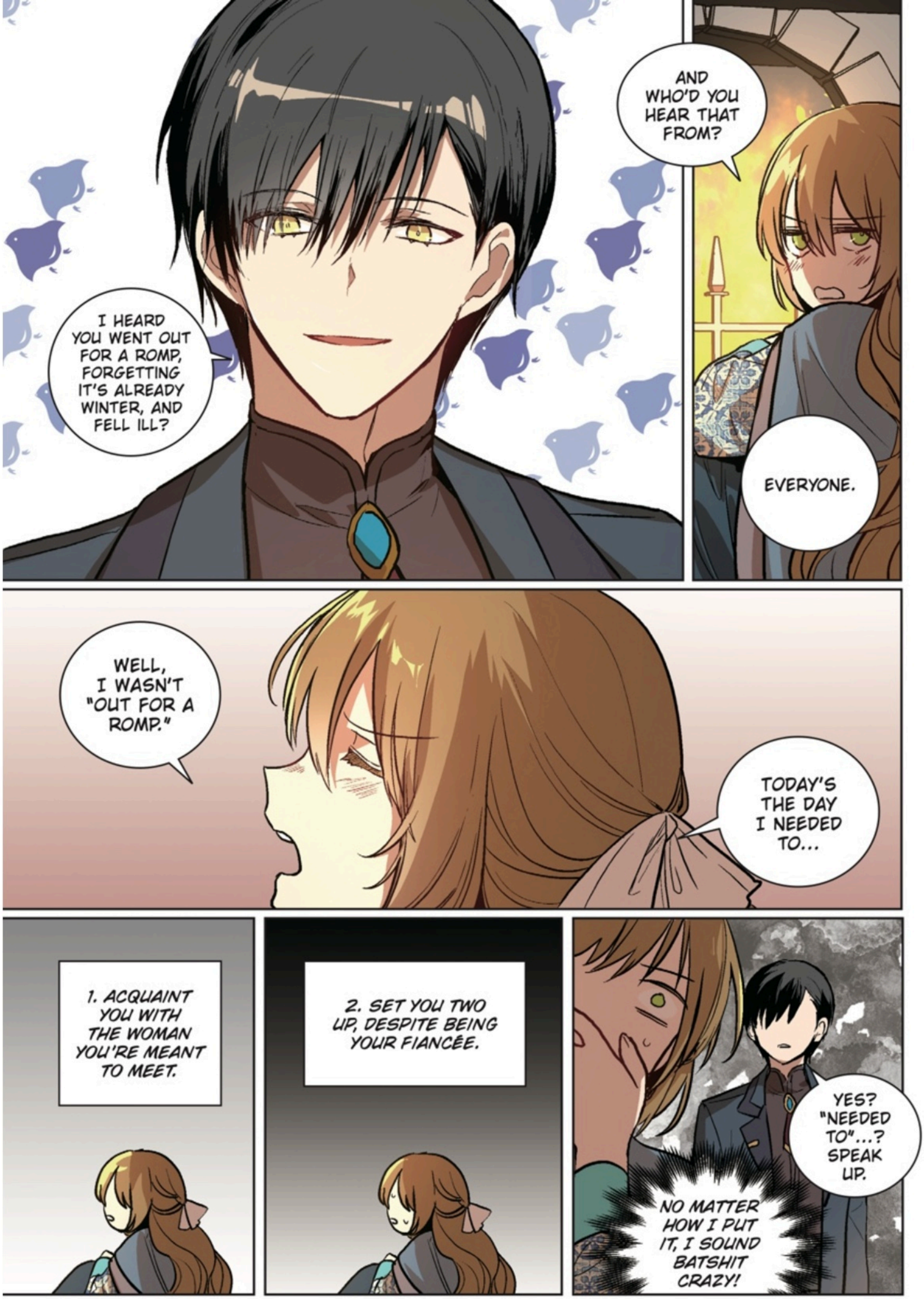
SHIVER

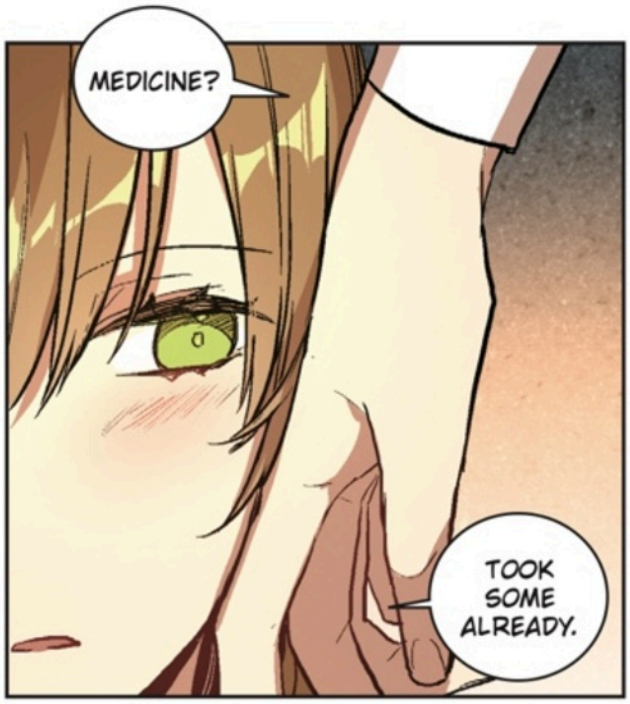
"HERE, GRANDDAUGHTER— A BLESSING FROM THE GRAND HIGH PRIEST WILL KEEP YOU FREE FROM ALL ILLNESS FOR A WHOLE YEAR." RUBBISH.

SO DROWSY. I CAN'T FALL ASLEEP HERE, THOUGH...

CREAK

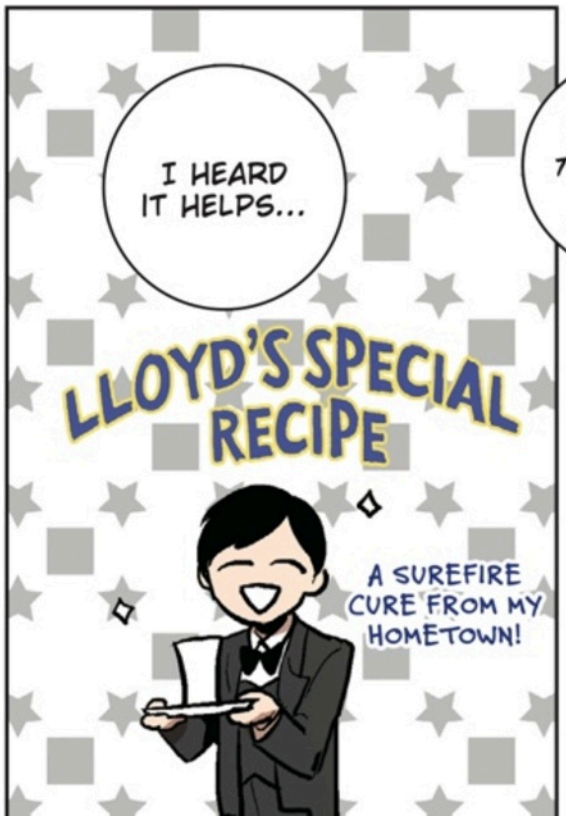
RAELIANA.


I HEARD YOU WENT OUT FOR A ROMP, FORGETTING IT'S ALREADY WINTER, AND FELL ILL?
AND WHO'D YOU HEAR THAT FROM?
EVERYONE.
WELL, I WASN'T "OUT FOR A ROMP."
TODAY'S THE DAY I NEEDED TO...
1. ACQUAINT YOU WITH THE WOMAN YOU'RE MEANT TO MEET.
2. SET YOU TWO UP, DESPITE BEING YOUR FIANCÉE.
YES? "NEEDED TO"...? SPEAK UP.
NO MATTER HOW I PUT IT, I SOUND BATSHIT CRAZY!


MEDICINE?
TOOK SOME ALREADY.

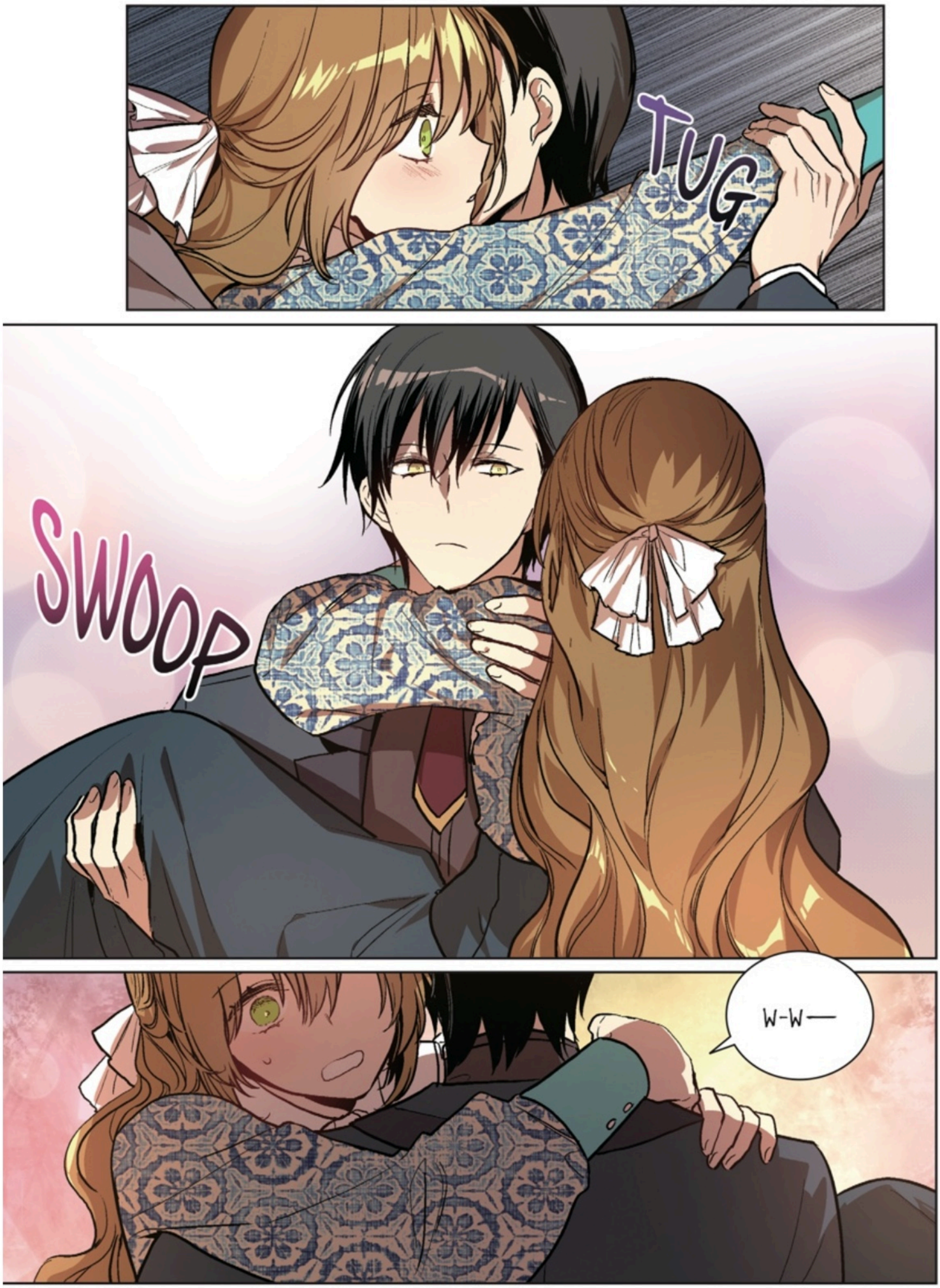
LEAN

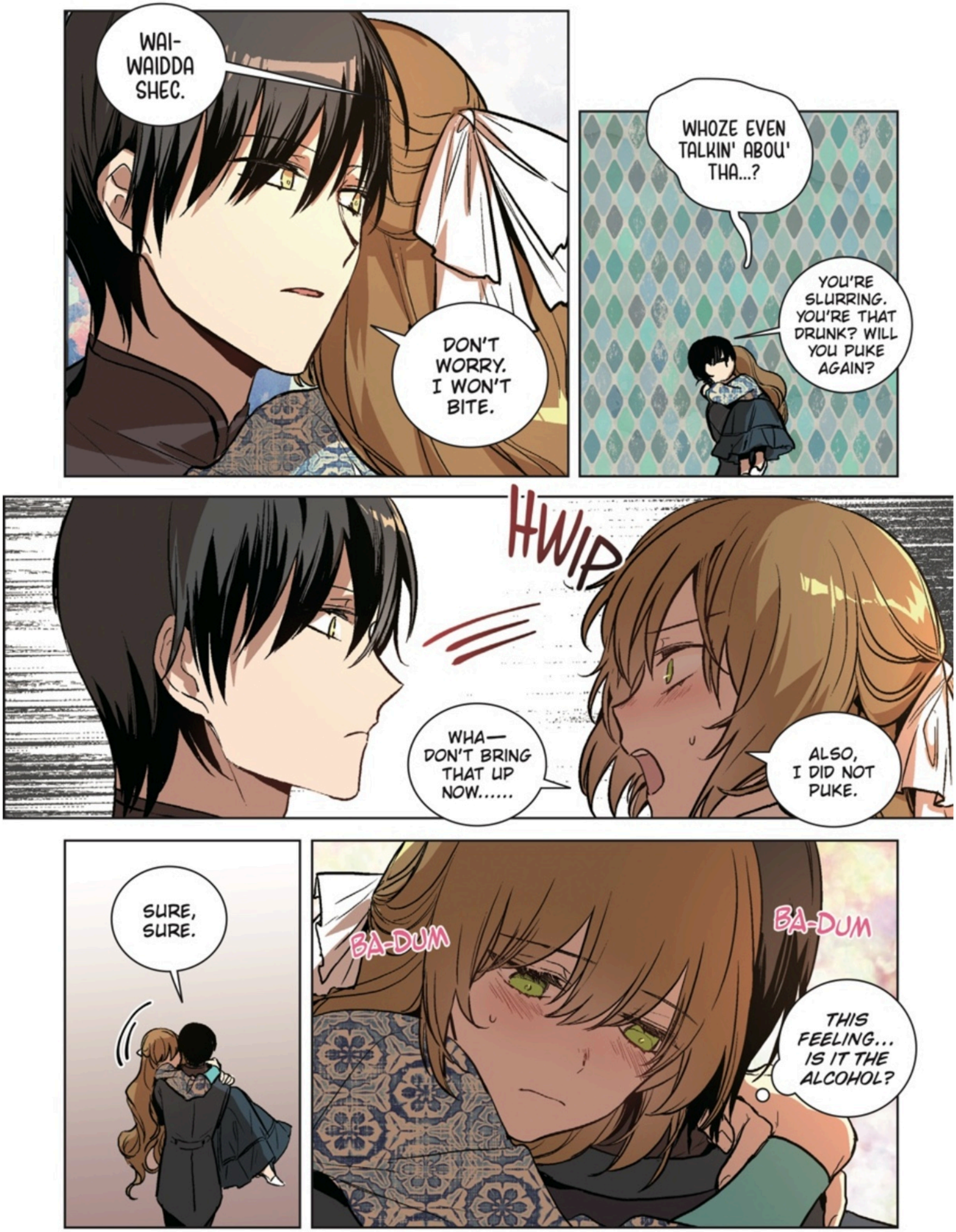
YOU SMELL OF BOOZE.
TOOK SOME OF THAT TOO.
FOR A COLD?


I HEARD IT HELPS...
LLOYD'S SPECIAL RECIPE
A SUREFIRE CURE FROM MY HOMETOWN!

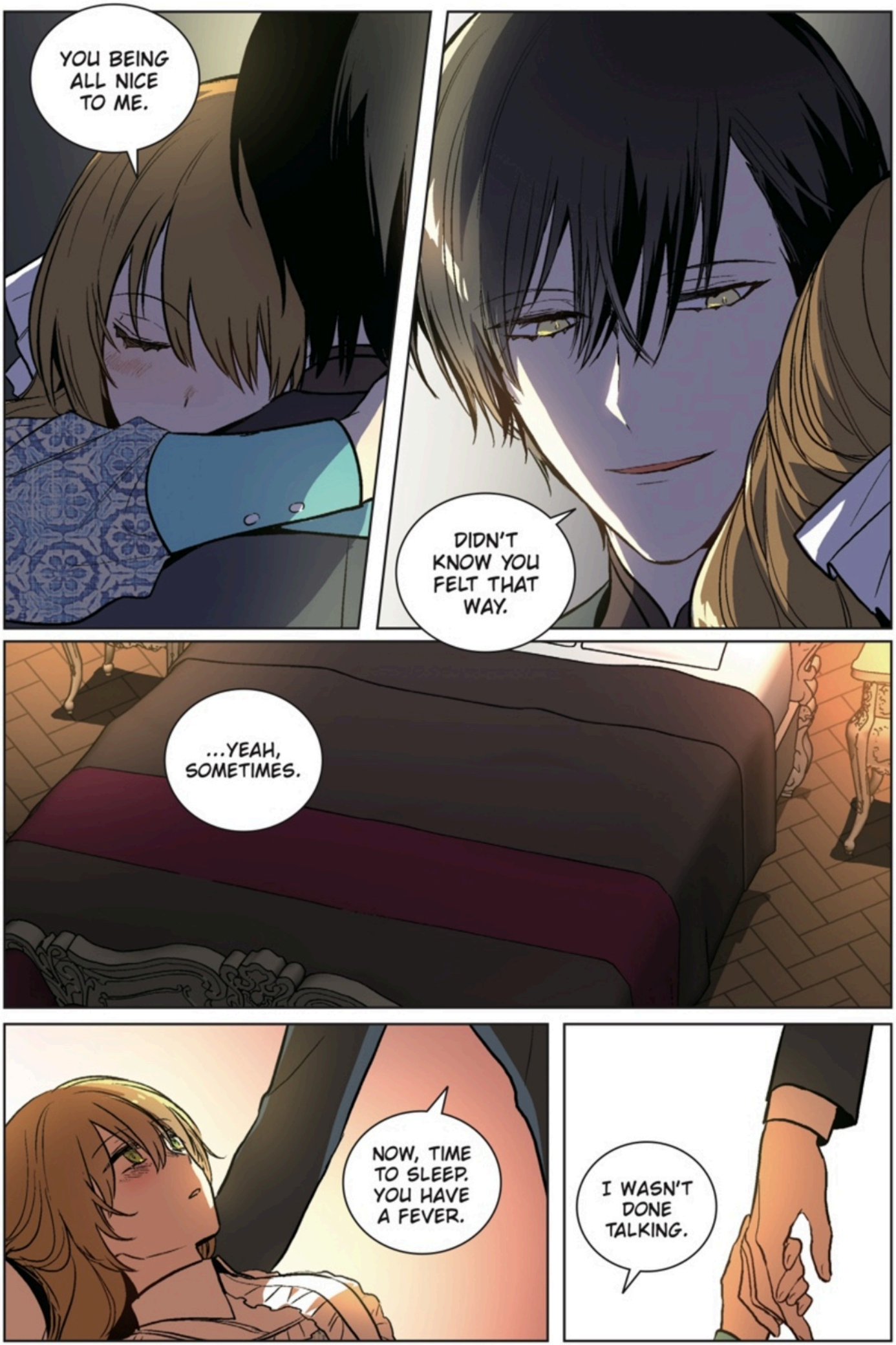
I SUPPOSE THERE WAS THE OUTDOOR DRINKING PARTY TOO.

IS THAT WHY YOU'RE UNABLE TO STAND?
UM... MAYBE.
MORE LIKE "DEFINITELY," I WOULD THINK.


TUG
SWOOP
W-W—

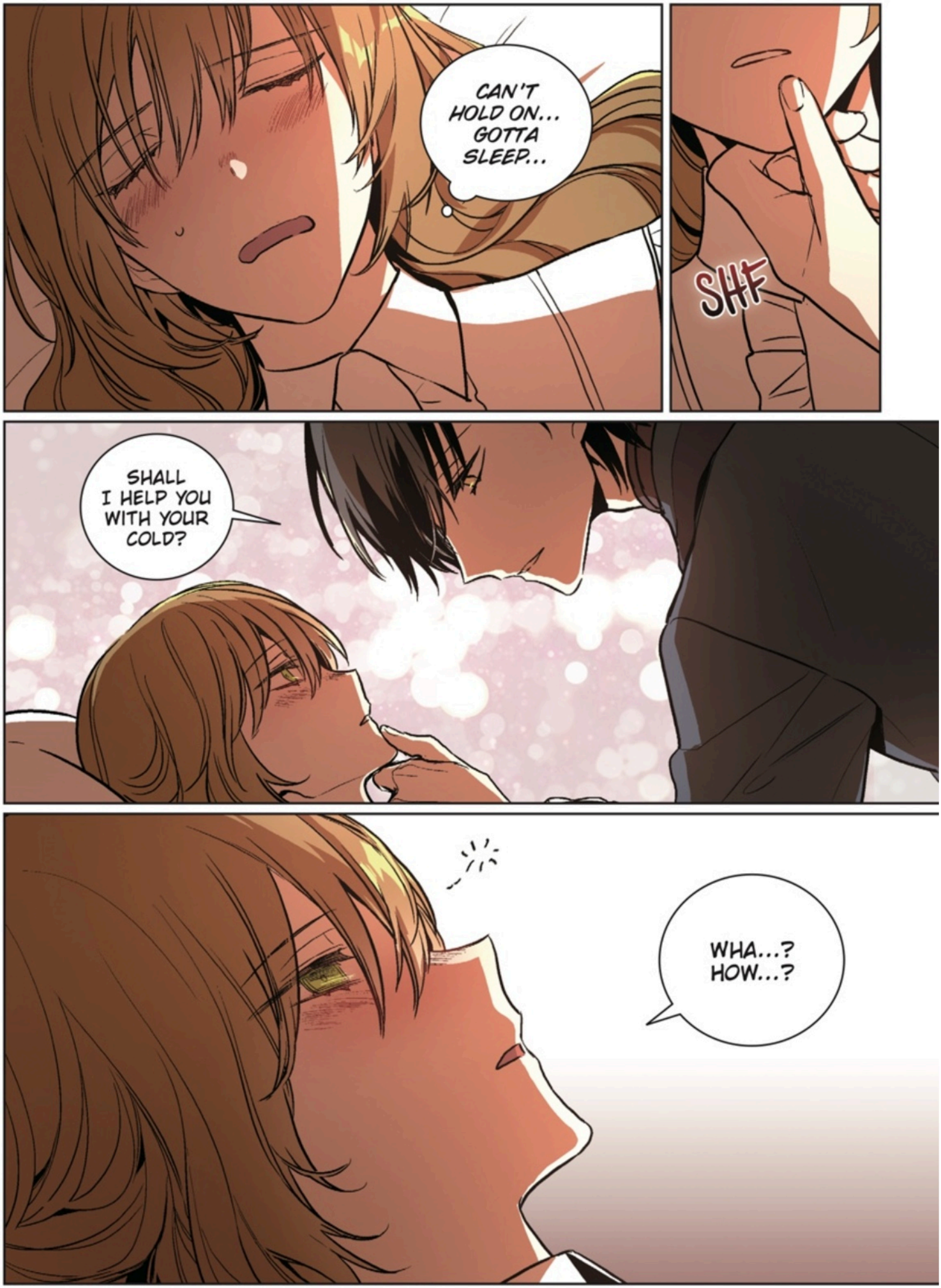

WAI-WAIDDA SHEC.
DON'T WORRY. I WON'T BITE.
WHOZE EVEN TALKIN' ABOU' THA...?
YOU'RE SLURRING. YOU'RE THAT DRUNK? WILL YOU PUKE AGAIN?
HWIP
WHA— DON'T BRING THAT UP NOW.....
ALSO, I DID NOT PUKE.
SURE, SURE.
BA-DUM
BA-DUM
THIS FEELING... IS IT THE ALCOHOL?

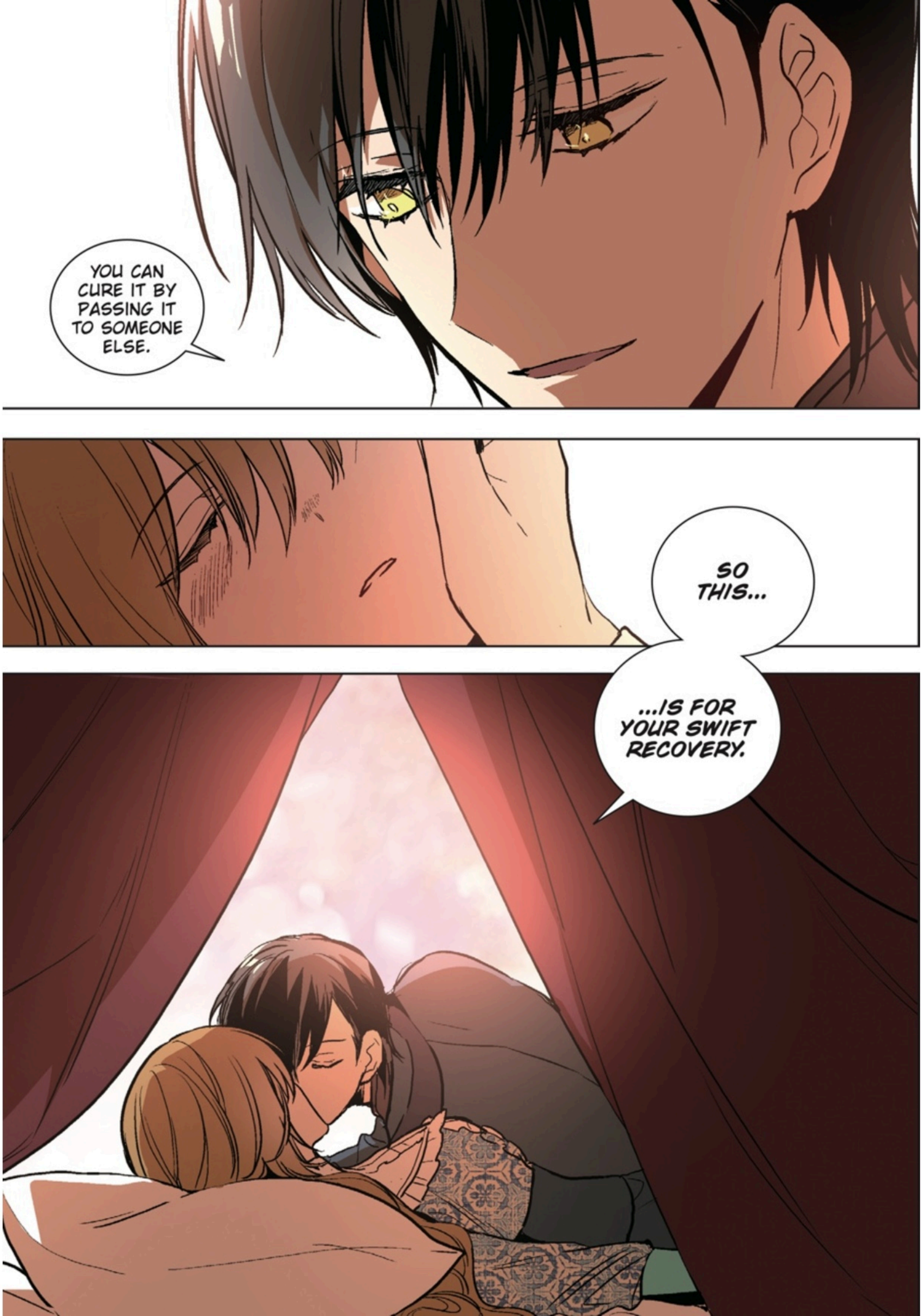
THIS'S WEIRD.
WHAT IS?


YOU BEING ALL NICE TO ME.
DIDN'T KNOW YOU FELT THAT WAY.
...YEAH, SOMETIMES.
NOW, TIME TO SLEEP. YOU HAVE A FEVER.
I WASN'T DONE TALKING.

OH?
I'VE BEEN WEIRD TOO, LATELY...
I KEEP THINKING ABOUT YOU.

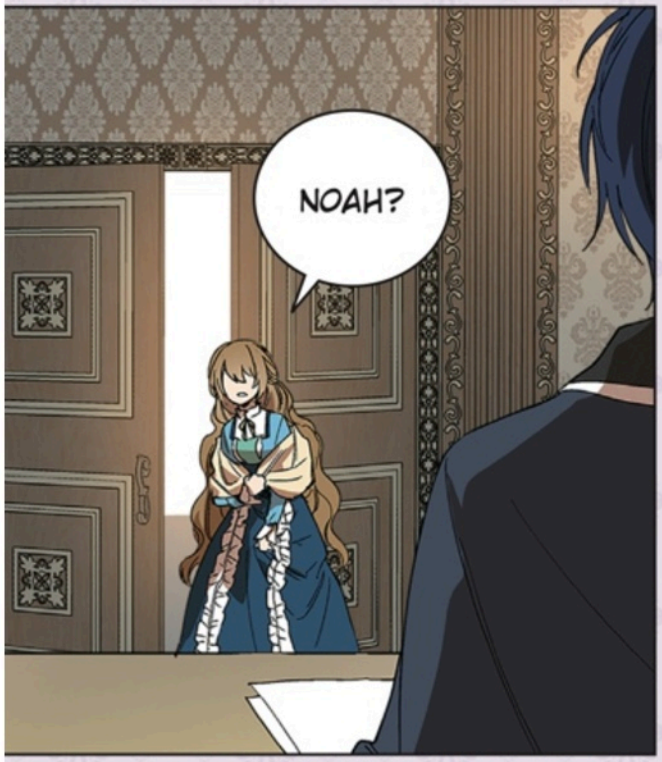
AH—
CHOO!
ACHOO!

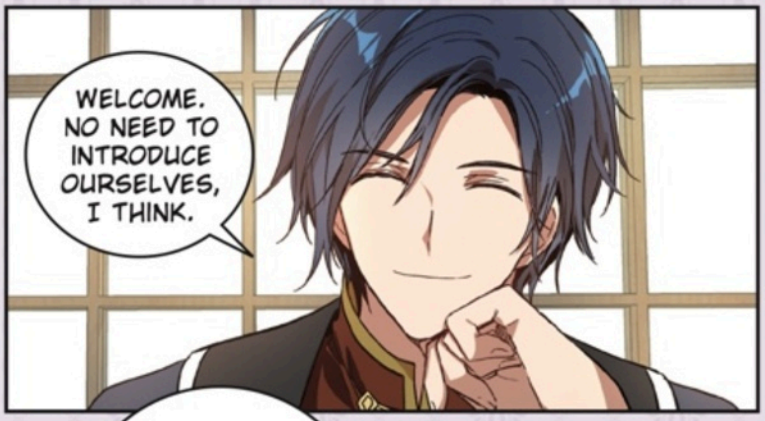

CAN'T HOLD ON... GOTTA SLEEP...
SHF
SHALL I HELP YOU WITH YOUR COLD?
WHA...? HOW...?


YOU CAN CURE IT BY PASSING IT TO SOMEONE ELSE.
SO THIS...
...IS FOR YOUR SWIFT RECOVERY.

To be continued in Volume 4...

Volume 4 Preview





LOVE NEEDS A LITTLE SUFFERING, YOU KNOW.

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"WILL I HAVE TO ENTER INTO A MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE? WITH SOMEONE OTHER THAN NOAH?"

Find out what happens in...

Why Raeliana Ended Up at the Duke's Mansion

Why Raeliana Ended Up at the Duke's Mansion 3

Whale

Original story by Milcha

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